Northside Realism : Critique or Illusion?

PhD Thesis.
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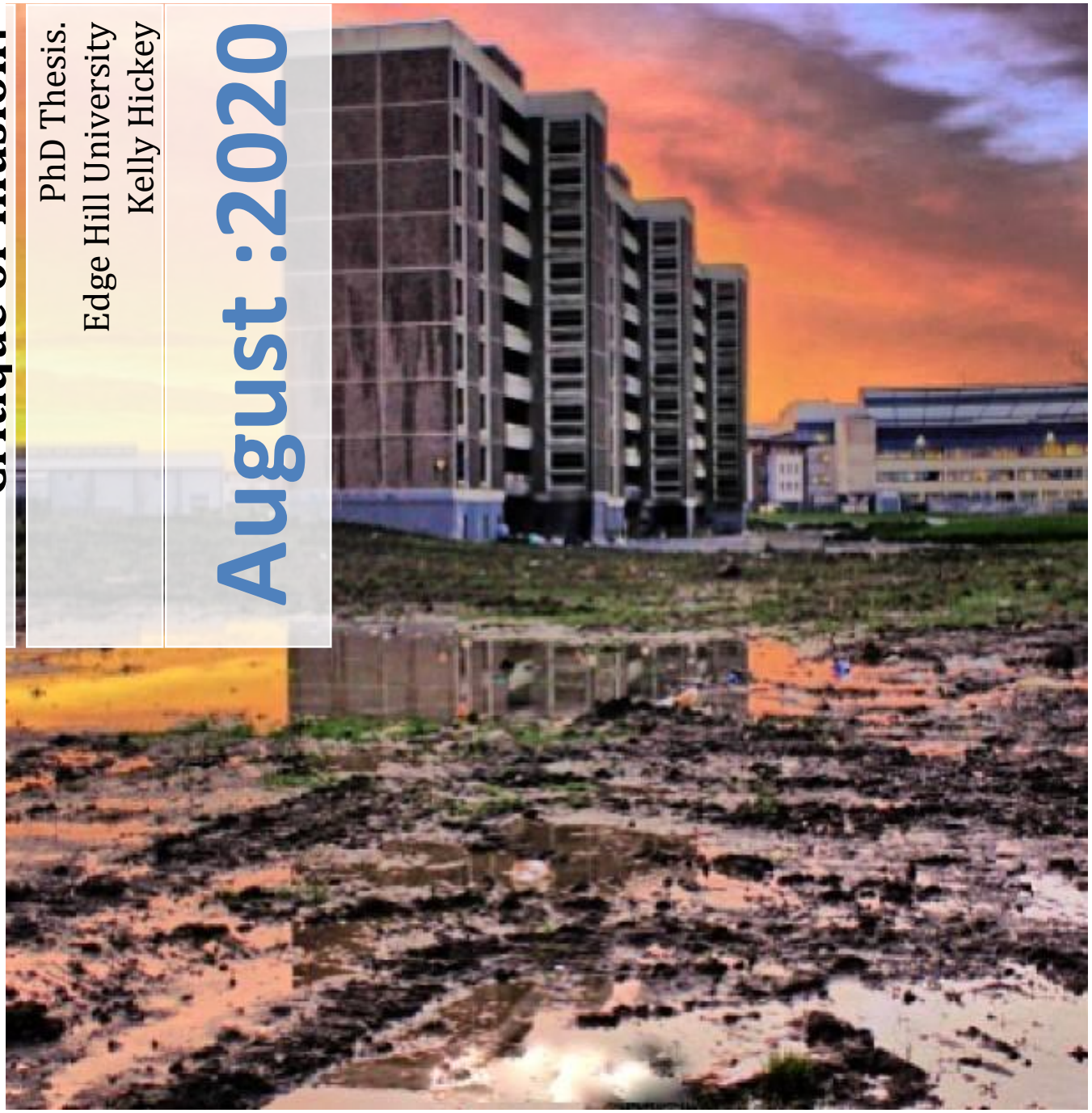

Not as a Foreign Tourist Does

Then I wondered, how does a place become
A reflection of its image in myth,
Or an adjective of speech?
And is a thing's image stronger
Than the thing itself?
If it weren't for my imagination
My other self would have told me,
"You are not here!"

Mahmoud Darwish (2005)

Kelly Hickey. PhD Thesis: *Northside Realism: Critique or Illusion?*

Abstract

The image of Dublin as a city of two halves is prevalent in contemporary Irish culture. This thesis interrogates the literal boundaries of Ireland's capital and explores ways in which the physical boundaries of the city manifest in the cultural divisions of the communities of Dublin. There is a focus on the Northside of the city and the stigma that is the result of uneven geographies of neoliberal development in Ireland's capital. The thesis examines the politics of the fictional narrative structures of the plays of three prominnt figures in Irish theatre who use the Northside as a setting for their work; Paul Mercier, Roddy Doyle and Dermot Bolger. The work of these playwrights coincides with the rise and fall of the much-documented economic phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger. Examination of these texts reveal the construction of class identity within contemporary Irish neoliberal ideology and narratives that reify or resist this ideology. This thesis draws on the positionality of myself, the researcher, and my experience of growing up, on the Northside of Dublin, in Ballymun during Europe's largest urban regeneration of the area. This original insight explores my experience living in a shifting landscape while being afforded the unique opportunity to perform leading roles in the world premieres of plays by internationally renowned playwright Dermot Bolger. This thesis uses an original critical matrix to dissent from dominant criticism of the plays by the three key playwrights and offers an original critique of the narrative structures that empower or oppress the lower and working classes in neoliberal Ireland and divide Ireland's capital city.

Key Terms:

Dublin, Ireland, Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle, Paul Mercier, Ballymun, Neoliberalism,

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Finally, my husband, David Gavin. Thank you for sitting at the front of this rollercoaster with me. Thank you for giving me the courage to see it through and for being a constant source of stability through the ups and downs. A thousand times, thank you.

Dedicated to my Granda,

Christopher ‘Mickey’ Hickey

Who once told me he went to college;

To stand at the gate to watch the scholars coming out.

Contents

Introduction

> The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society, any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand.
>
> (Douglas, 2001, p.115)

This thesis interrogates the narratives of power, and the power of narratives. It examines the boundaries of Dublin. It interrogates the city's physical landscapes and explores how they shape and inform narrative structures that generate an image of the city, its places, and the people who inhabit them. This thesis uses an original critical matrix to probe the multifarious ideas and practices that inform or challenge this image, and considers how their political complexity serves or contests contemporary dominant ideology in Ireland. The claim to originality of this thesis focuses primarily on the plays that are defined as a school of Northside Realism by Kersti Tarien Powell. The analysis focuses on plays set on the Northside that immediately preceded, and coincide with the economic phenomenon of the Celtic Tiger, which took place at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, loosely mirroring the time in which the regeneration of Ballymun took place. The key figures explored, Paul Mercier, Roddy Doyle and Dermot Bolger are the influential Northside writers of this time, as stated by Powell. Explorations of their writing reveal contradictory attitudes to lower- and working-class Northsiders during this boom and bust in Ireland. One of the main reasons to undertake this enquiry is a need to come to terms with a lack of

fit between my personal experience as a working-class female growing up in a stigmatised housing estate, and influential representations of gendered class-based realities. The term 'lower and working class' is used throughout this thesis to emphasise the demographic of the areas being discussed. Anne Power in her seminal work *Estates on the Edge: The Social Consequences of Mass Housing in Europe* (1998) explains the complex make up of social estates in Europe and uses Ballymun as a case study on the creation of an underclass. In this thesis the term 'lower and working class' is used to convey the precarity of the class status of the people in the neo liberal construction of the North inner city and in Ballymun which are areas of focus for this thesis. Mercier, Doyle and Bolger are categorised as belonging to a school of Northside realism by Kersti Tarien Powell and representations of these areas are found in their work. I use Kevin Lynch's strategy of cognitive mapping to position my perspective in the lower and working class margins of Dublin and challenge the 'skanger' or 'chav' narrative stereotype used to enforce neoliberal ideology. The plays of Paul Mercier, Roddy Doyle and Dermot Bolger are analysed to critique the representation of the fictional Northsider. In turn, criticism of these dramas by other academics is interrogated to explore ways in which scholarship tends mainly to assert or subvert neoliberal representations of identities of poverty. The critical matrix used is interdisciplinary, involving research in Irish theatre studies, geography, philosophy, and the social sciences. It explores the intersectionality of the many facets that influence identity on the Northside of Dublin. This thesis asserts the originality of my critical eye, formed in the margins of Irish society and now availing of a rare opportunity for this perspective to find voice in academic criticism. The chapter structure reflects a diversity of approaches to conveying the complex neoliberal structure of contemporary Ireland and how theatre immersed in the rising Celtic Tiger reflects this. This thesis uses a range of theoretical lenses, including postcolonial criticism, to examine the nature of contemporary neoliberal

ideology in Ireland. The argument explores the possibility that subordination of subject races in colonial structures is paralleled in neoliberal class structure. As Shaun Richards and Chris Morash assert 'realism […] produces a conceived space that requires a "certainty" with a knowable centre and solidarity' (2013, p.49). Exploration of the structure and form of realism in each of the chosen plays serves to interrogate the notion of certainty and how this can become problematic when representing underrepresented voices. Bertolt Brecht empahsises that 'there are many ways of supressing truth and many ways of stating it' (1964, p. 203) This thesis explores the many ways Northsiders are represented and how this representation reflects reality. It is through this exploration that this thesis will determine the extent to which Powell's assertion of a school of Northside realism is an accurate critique of the plays of Mercier, Doyle and Bolger or if the notion of a Northside realism is mere illusion.

The secondary focus of this thesis is a detailed interrogation of the division of Dublin city, North and South. This is to contextualise Northside realism within the wider structure of Ireland's capital city. Divided geographically by the River Liffey, Ireland's capital city is also divided culturally along the same lines. It is a common notion among Dubliners and non-Dubliners alike that the capital is more or less partitioned into north and south and that this division underpins a binary stereotype of the identity of the people who inhabit each side of the River Liffey. The notion of the city divided is an influential part of city living, yet there is little or no sustained critical exploration of this. The purpose of my research was to begin a much-needed critique of Dublin's urban divide, and the social dynamics it continues to produce, with specific attention to the literal and figurative construction of the Northside of Dublin. Integral to the secondary focus is the critical 'I' that forms the perspective of the research. My unique experience growing up in the margins of Dublin, Ballymun, during Europe's largest urban regeneration, while

simultaneously being mentored to become a professional actor/drama practitioner by the axis Arts and Community Resource centre, built during the regeneration, offers original insight. I experienced first-hand the stigma of being from a heavily stereotyped area and the assumptions projected onto my character and identity from those outside. My experience of being involved in the axis mission of 'excellence and inclusion' and being introduced to narratives of my area that were alternative to the stereotype, sowed the seeds for this research.

The origins of Dublin's distinctive North/South divide can be found in the period leading up to and immediately following independence, when the more affluent began to favour the south side of the city for private investment. Following independence, from 1922, a yearning to discard a colonial past exacerbated this divide, as the Georgian dwellings on the Northside of the city, which were damned by association with British rule, were shunned and those with means began to favour the Southside of the city leading down to the Dublin Mountains. The belated emergence of modernity in the 1960s and the buy-in to neoliberal policies which began under Taoiseach Sean Lemass intensified this divide with a concentration of public development and social housing on the Northside of the city (MacLaran 1993, Hanna 2010). Rob Kitchin, Cian O'Callaghan, Mark Boyle, Justin Gleeson and Karen Keaveney highlight this in their article 'Placing Neoliberalism: The Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger'. They assert that 'from the 1960s on Ireland embraced a model of a liberal and open economy and aggressively sought to court export-oriented manufacturing, piloting and adopting policies which would later be labelled 'neoliberal'' (2012, p.1306). The rise of the Celtic Tiger further compounded this divide and generated chasms of inequality in Ireland which are reflected in the demographic features of the capital city. The divide is a widely accepted point of Dublin living which is referred to or joked about daily

on the streets of Dublin. Mainstream popular cultural references to this division can be widely found. A contemporary example of this division being celebrated in popular culture is the playful and award-winning ad campaign by Bulmer's 'North Cider? Or South Cider', which was visible north of the Liffey until February 2019. (See Ills. 1.1)

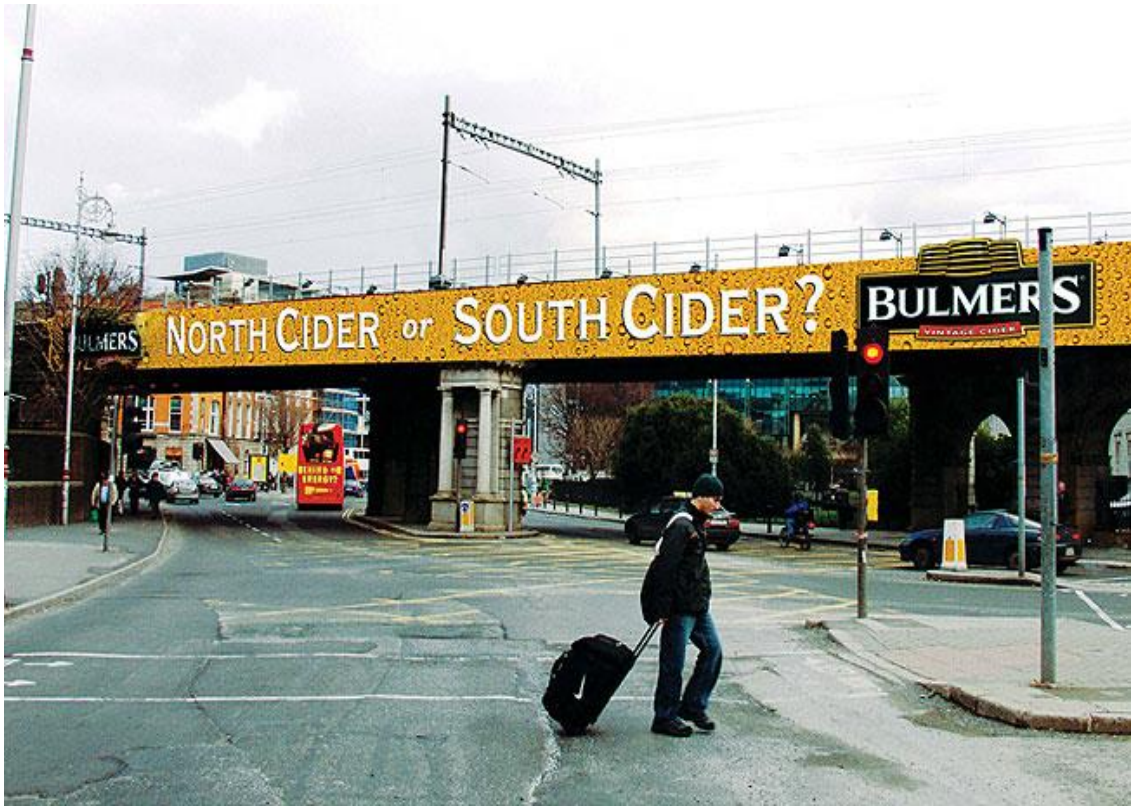

Illustration 1.1(https://www.icad.ie/award/north-cider-or-south-cider/)

In Dublin, past and present, this binary is embedded in everyday vernacular and reflected in popular culture, advertisements, music, television and radio. In 1978 the Boomtown Rats released their song *Rattrap* which includes the lyrics; 'You can make it if you want to or you need it bad enough […] Put on the bright suit Billy, head for the right side of town'. The opening verse includes the lines,

> Just down past the gasworks, by the meat factory door,
> The Five Lamp boys were coming on strong.

(http://www.metrolyrics.com/rat-trap-lyrics-boomtown-rats.html)

The Five Lamps is a well-known landmark, 'a decorative lamp post with five lanterns, which stands at the junction of five streets - Portland Row, North Strand Road, Seville Place, Amiens Street and Killarney Street' (http://www.dublincity.ie/dublin-buildings/five-lamps) in Dublin's north inner city. By evoking it, the song places the action there, and confirms the division of the capital into a 'right' side, and a 'wrong' one, signifying Dublin's pervading binary. Another example of this is the RTÉ production, *Damo and Ivor* (2013). The comedy sketch programme uses grotesque humour to convey two characters, both played by Andrew Quirke: Damo, from the impoverished Northside, and Ivor, from the more affluent Southside. Both characters are aggravated stereotypes of the binary of Northside/Southside identity but there is a clear pure/impure binary at play. This is a common perception of the Dublin divide. A simple google search of 'Northside Southside Dublin' brings up a wealth of references to the divide, including a popular Dublin-focused page, *Dublin Escapes*, which documents jokes that emphasize the divide such as;

> What separates humans from the animals? The Liffey.
>
> What's the difference between Southside man and a Northside girl? Northside girls have higher sperm counts.
>
> Two Northsiders jump off a cliff, who wins? Society.
>
> (http://www.dublinescape.com/dublin-northsiders-vs-dublin-southsiders.html)

What emerges is an inferior/superior trope that is derived from prejudiced clichés of the social inferiority of the Northside compared to the Southside. The ideological construction that subordinate groups need development from a state of degradation is common, both in narrative structures that support colonial rule, and class-based neoliberal ideology.

In her seminal text *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2001), Mary Douglas explores the structural function of notions of purity and impurity in social relations, actual and imagined. She explains how notions of communities as impure serve perceptions of supposed undeveloped demographics of people in society as a method of power and control. According to her how these ideas of people are formed generate boundaries and margins in society. Douglas asserts that 'so many ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding non-form. There is a power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries' (Douglas, 2001 p.99). In classifying the identities, that make up the 'form' in society, the 'non-form' is identified in juxtaposition and these non-conforming communities make up the margins of society. There is always a need to exert control of these margins, as there is a raw power that exists here that threatens the dominant social form, and the established social order. Douglas emphasises this when she states that 'all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that, the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins' (Douglas, 2001 p.122). The status quo is the patterns of behaviours that make up society and its systems. Douglas asserts that there is a danger in the margins as this is where societal systems are at their weakest and that 'to have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power' (2001, p. 98). The margins have the power to disrupt the acceptable norm and for this reason, a language of dominance is needed to maintain the status quo. The language of making the marginal part of society seem unorthodox is a method of preservation of the ideas that make the dominant social form seem like the ideal. Demonising the power of the margins reinforces the power of the form. This serves the dominant ideology. Douglas emphasises that 'the attribution of dangers and powers is part of this effort to communicate and thus to create social forms' (Douglas, 2001, p.100). One of

the most common methods of control is articulation. Those that have the ability to articulate have the ability to communicate their perspective and guard against that from the more unorthodox elements of society. Douglas explains that 'the articulate, conscious points in the social structure are armed with articulate, conscious powers to protect the system; the inarticulate, unstructured areas emanate unconscious powers which provoke others to demand that ambiguity be reduced' (Douglas, 2001 p.103).

The ability to articulate and normalise status in society reinforces and legitimises authority. Douglas explains how those on the margins, in areas of scarcity and ambiguity, at the mercy of dominant ideologies are seen as a threat to those with better defined status and so structures of authority are set up to undermine and control. What is difficult about these methods is that they articulate against those without the ability to articulate and therefore challenge these methods. As Douglas points out 'it is not always easy to recognise explicit authority' (Douglas, p.106). Interrogating the facets of this articulation is essential to recognising dominant ideologies.

The representation of the human body is central to the operation of structures of social power through pure/impure binary, whether articulated in terms of gender, sexuality, physicality, intelligence, or geography. Douglas explains how the representation of the body is metaphorical for the structures in which the body is bound philosophically, structurally and socially.

> The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures.
>
> (Douglas, p.116)

The permission granted by an individual for their body to exist in space is an important construct of society. Fictional narratives can legitimise or delegitimise this permission. A person does not have complete autonomy over this perspective and is influenced by outside representations. Douglas asserts that 'there is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience' (Douglas, p.116). It is from this that the complex critical matrix is formed, with a view to exploring fictional narratives that convey an attitude to lower and working class people and their cultural and social experience through the narrative construction of the individual's attitude to their own body and emotional experience. It is important to question binary thinking of good and bad sides of the city manifesting in the representation of the feral and the civilised; the pure and impure. Representations of the sexuality of Northsiders, and the terms in which discussions of sex and the body are explored, are vital to examining how neoliberal structures of power quell and control the raw power of working-class and lower class people in the margins, so as to serve the dominant form of society presented as the ideal to aspire to. As Kitchin et al., attest, there is a reluctance to name Irish political ideology as neoliberal, while also assuming this ideology as a 'common sense'. 'Its presence is barely articulated and often invisible' (Kitchin et al., 2012, p.1306). A brief look at the caricatures of Damo and Ivor or the pervading jokes of the Northside/Southside divide on Dublin escapes provides a miscrocosmic example as to how lower- and working-class bodies on the Northside are demonized as dirty. The representation of the bodies of the lower and working classes as impure, and the specific geo-location of those bodies, reinforces the geographies of neoliberalism.

These geographies of existing neoliberalism can be seen in the North/South division of Dublin. The emergence of a school of a Northside

specific realism reflecting this can be traced back to 1959 in James McKenna's *The Scatterin'*. Seamus O'Kelly located the play and its issues as Northside-specific in his review (*The Irish Times*, 14th September 1960),which asserted that 'James McKenna's play could have been called "North-side Story"' (O'Kelly, 1960, p.6). The structures of the inarticulate lower classes are evident in McKenna's play, that he presented in the form of a musical, and focused on the impoverished youth of Northside Dublin and their difficulty navigating a system set up against them. O'Kelly highlighted this point, stating that 'the dead-beat boys kick against their lot […] They kick and they hope as well. They get kicked back by Authority for kicking and they get kicked for hoping and trying' (O'Kelly, 1960, p.6).

The young people in McKenna's play deal with the frustration of being locked out of society and the inability to articulate this dominance prevents them for meaningful challenge. The criticism of the play being Northside-specific embeds issues of poverty in the north of the city. James McKenna harnessed the power of the theatre to highlight the complexity of this disadvantage and to highlight this for audiences that were ignorant of the plight of the lower classes. The play was first produced by The Pike Theatre and performed in the Abbey Theatre. He saw theatre as a vehicle to address these issues and make them visible. In an RTÉ interview during a rerun of *The Scatterin'* (Peacock Theatre,1973) McKenna discusses this. 'It was really extraordinary, people who you wouldn't have won over in straight arguments about the same issues somehow *The Scatterin'* […] won them over anyway' (McKenna, 1973, https://www.rte.ie/archives/2013/1203/490588-the-scatterin/)

It is important to point out that the moment of this play coincides with a shift in Irish politics to an ideology now identified as neoliberal. In 'Before the Celtic Tiger: Change Without Modernisation in Ireland 1959-1989', Brian Girvin (2010) argues that 'there is considerable change between 1961 and 1989

but this is more evident in economic policy and in external relations. These departures were largely directed by an elite' (Girvin, 2010, p.352). For the masses, the period immediately preceding the Celtic Tiger era (1960-1990) was formed and shaped by traditional structures of control, and 'despite reforms in some areas, the civil service, the Catholic Church and the educational system reflect continuity rather than dramatic change over the thirty years reviewed (Girvin 2010, p. 353). McLaren also marks 1960 as a significant date that marked a shift in the division of Dublin, 'During the 1930s and 1950s, when Ireland was a relatively impoverished state with a languishing economic base, public sector housing development actually outpaced that of the private sector. […] during the following decades, the role of the public sector diminished' (McLaren, 2015, p.15).

The shift in the 1960s toward the promotion of private sector development in Ireland was strongly felt in Dublin. The move to neoliberal policies in the 1960s fuelled a widening income divide, either side of the Liffey, as 'the explicit structure of society is based on landholding' (Douglas, p.104). The movement of the more financially affluent to the southern suburbs, and the promotion of public development to the north of the city, exacerbated Dublin's social division. The normalising of neoliberal practice ensured little opposition to this, as it was presented as a change for the greater good. David Harvey argues that neoliberalism generates its own kind of common sense, which enables claims to be made that it is a system that serves the well-being of society. He states that:

> Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade.

(Harvey, 2007. p.22)

The manifestation of neoliberal policies based on the explicit control of land in Ireland has produced urban geographies which reflect this view, and understanding this helps to understand the North/South division of Dublin city. As Kitchin et al point out; 'Irish neoliberalism was produced through a set of short-term (intermittently reformed) deals brokered by the state with various companies, individuals, and representative bodies, which cumulatively restructured Ireland in unsustainable and geographically "uneven" ways' (2012, p.1306). This thesis interrogates this uneven geography in relation to the capital.

The following chapters will explore these ideas, and their influence on shaping forms, images and imaginings of the working- and lower-class Northsider. The analysis will cast light on how the physical development of Dublin and the policies and approaches to planning which enabled it have made an 'Irish case for critical human geographies of actually existing neoliberalism' (Kitchin et al, 2012, p.1321). Thus, the thesis makes use of an interdisciplinary critical matrix in order to explore the complexity of representations of working and lower classes in Ballymun. Ballymun serves as a microcosm that is an example of uneven neoliberal geographies in contemporary Ireland. The power of fictional narratives in constructing narratives of actual power is exposed by interrogating the many levels of interplay between the imaginary and the real.

In Chapter 1, 'Independent Ireland, Theatre and Dublin Divided', the literal and figurative division of the city is explored. The figurative structures of the city begin to be revised from the point of Ireland's independence, as it attempted to become a postcolonial nation. The impact of this on constructions of Irish identity is explored. This chapter utilises the postcolonial philosophies of some of the most prominent theorists on the subject, including Homi K. Bhabha (2004), Edward Said (1994) and David Lloyd (1999). The importance

of Irish theatre as a medium through which independent Ireland attempted to reconfigure Irish identity is examined. Key figures in Irish theatre criticism, including Lionel Pilkington, Shaun Richards and Chris Morash provide essential insight to convey this. The work of Andrew MacLaran (1993) and Erika Hanna (2010) then develops this research further to interrogate the division of Dublin city, mapping the effects of independence and physical and social construction and reconstruction, in the aftermath of colonial rule in the capital. The stage Irishman, identified by Christopher Fitz-Simon, in his book *The Irish Theatre* (1983) as 'nineteenth century invention' (1983, p.99) was a tool for colonial oppression noted by Fitz-Simon as emerging around 1827. John Hargaden, in his article 'The Stage Irishman in Modern Irish Drama', defined the stage Irishman in two sub categories as 'parasite slave [or] braggart warrior' (1990, p.45) prior to the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the 20th century. The Irish Literary Theatre, according to Hargaden, attempted to reframe the stage Irishman not as a fool concerned with his own gain but as a charmed brogue concerned with the advancement of his people. The image of the stage Irishman is compared with contemporary depictions of the working and lower class Dubliners in neoliberal Ireland.

The motivation and driver this thesis is laid out in Chapter 2, 'Finding my Voice: Ballymunners Rob Your Runners'. Following a 'Homework' methodology, laid out by Gerry Smyth in his, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (2001), I design and explore a cognitive framework of my own hometown of Ballymun, a suburb of North Dublin. This framework will use the work of Kevin Lynch and his approach of 'cognitive mapping' from his influential work *The Image of the City* (1960). Ballymun serves as an ideal example of the societal division and class subordination that has become endemic in neoliberal Celtic Tiger Ireland of the late 20th and early 21st

century. At the heart of Ballymun is 'axis' Arts and Community Resource Centre which offers a space to explore and challenge dominant narratives of systemic oppression. This chapter highlights the potential of arts, in this case theatre, as mechanisms to open cracks in the social exclusion generated by neoliberal ideology. Ballymun is a microcosm of the development of neoliberal policies in Ireland and is a prototype of the construction of geographies of neoliberalism. This chapter draws on personal experience while exploring the perception and development of Ballymun. This chapter engages with extensive work on Dublin by Yvonne Whelan (2003) and that of Anne Power (1999) on social deprivation. This chapter explores the vision of lead designer of the regeneration of Ballymun, David Prichard (2005, 2008) and Ciaran Murray, director of Ballymun Regeneration Ltd (BRL), so as to analyse the impact on local area planning of state polices of neoliberalism. This chapter highlights the uphill struggle of social inclusion to operate in a meaningful way when private led neoliberal agendas are dominant.

Chapter 3, 'Theatre of Wasters: The Emergence of the "Northside Theatre"', explores the plays that could be perceived as Northside-specific, staged in the 1980s during an energetic period in Irish theatre history seen by Ferdia Mac Anna as the Dublin Renaissance (MacAnna, 1991). During the economic depression of 1980s Dublin, the Passion Machine Theatre Company gained popularity by exploring urban issues largely ignored by the mainstream theatre scene. Passion Machine produced plays that dealt with contemporary working-class Dublin youth and the effect of Ireland's growing modernity. Classified as 'The Northside Theatre', Passion Machine plays were seen as unique to one side of Dublin. This chapter critically analyses the plays *Drowning* (1984) and *Wasters* (1985) by playwright Paul Mercier. These are the early plays that established Passion Machine on the Northside of the city and encouraged the titles 'Northside Theatre'. The playwright, for the purpose of

this thesis, has generously granted access to an archive of unpublished plays, largely unexplored in academic criticism. These two plays offer differing approaches to realism and styles of representation of Dublin's Northsiders. This chapter uses the theories of philosophers Jerome Bruner, bell hooks and Charles Murray, alongside critical work by Fintan O'Toole and Jen Harvie, to critique a culture of materialist consumption endemic in the rising neoliberal climate of Ireland in the 80s prior to the economic boom. This chapter problematizes the homogenisation of people in poverty in the dramatic narratives of Mercier's plays, and places them in the context of the wider social issues in Dublin at the time.

The early plays and novels of Roddy Doyle are the focus of Chapter 4, 'Salty Chips, Loose Knickers and Domestic Violence: Roddy Doyle and the Northside Working Class'. It centres on a critical analyses of Doyle's early work: *Brownbread* (1987), the TV series *Family* (1994) and *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (2001). Since the early 1990s Roddy Doyle has been widely regarded as a voice for the North Dublin working class voiceless. Doyle has achieved commercial success both nationally and internationally and his representations of the Northside have been dominant in Irish cultural discourse. This chapter interrogates Doyle's representation of the working-class female body and sexuality. The critical lens through which I read his work is developed from the social philosophy of Pierre Bourdieu, and seminal work by Mary Douglas on notions of purity and impurity in the construction of sexuality and contrived inferiority. Douglas contends that 'as fear inhibits reason it can be held accountable for other peculiarities in primitive thought, notably the idea of defilement' (2001, p.1). This chapter explores uses of language that determine the abject other of postcolonial discourse, and reads contradictions in the representation of poverty in terms of primitive and feral defilement that promotes a disgust of working-class sexuality, particularly that of the female.

This chapter challenges the dominant discourse that these plays are innovative and emancipatory representations of North Dublin which surrounds the work of Doyle, and starkly highlights the oppressive voice within the dramatic narratives of his stage scripts, novels and films.

Chapter 5, 'Poetics of scarcity: Dermot Bolger's tacit solidarity with poverty', will critically analyse the plays of Dermot Bolger and dissent from criticism of his canon, which describes his representation of modern Dublin as bleak and dark. It follows the contention by Michael Pierse that Bolger is 'a writer impatient for political change' (2013, p.53). This chapter will highlight the empowering nature his narrative structure offers and explore the tacit solidarity with the working class that is an essential feature of Bolger's novels and plays. This chapter focuses particularly on one of Bolger's earliest plays, *One Last White Horse* (1991), reading it as an exemplary staging of the struggle of the lower and working classes to navigate the socially generated scarcity of neoliberalism. Using a framework provided by economic theorist Charles Clark, the rationalisation of the economic language of neoliberalism is explored in relation to socially generated and legitimised social exclusion. Perspectives drawn from an emerging social science of the psychological effects of this scarcity, put forward by Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, enhance the exposure of the core value of social solidarity in Bolger's work. Mullainathan and Shafir draw attention to a structure of 'taxation' of the capacity of those in poverty which, in turn, influences personal choice and imprisons the most vulnerable in society in a cycle of scarcity while simultaneous legitimising neoliberal dominance. *One Last White Horse* portrays the complexity of internally legitimised social class and the insidious nature of the contrived aspiration of the ideal. Bolger's preoccupation with abstract space generates an image of a marginalised Northside as a sort of limbo which in turn empowers the Northside as a space in process and subverts the neoliberal tendency of fixed

geographies of identity organised around dominance and degradation. This chapter concludes that Bolger has created a poetics of scarcity that exposes the social mechanisms of this socially generated scarcity to free the Northside from stereotypical neoliberal geographies of identity.

In her text *Irish literature: An Introduction* (date), Kirsti Tarien Powell positions both Bolger and Doyle as members of a school of Northside realism which emerged in the 80s. Chapter 6, 'Voicing voicelessness: Explorations of Northside Dublin through Narratives that Empower and Narratives that Oppress' will analyse trilogies by each playwright that are set on the Northside to expose a stark variation of representation offered by each playwright and problematise the assertion by Powell that the work of each playwright could belong to the same school of realism. It will contrast and compare Doyle and Bolger by treating their works as a diptych of representations of the Northside. Doyle's *Barrytown Trilogy* (1992) and Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy* (2010) are juxtaposed to reveal narratives of oppression and empowerment in each. Using the triad of 'Power, Sex, Class' attributed to Fintan O'Toole by Michael Pierse, this chapter juxtaposes each trilogy under these categories, and interrogates popular critique of the work of each playwright as cultural critique. It reveals the paradoxical nature of critical positions, some of which explicitly support neoliberal dominance.

The conclusion of this thesis will establish whether a school of Northside realism is an accurate critique of the work of Mercier, Doyle and Bolger or a mere illusionist neo liberal representation of Northsiders. As Ireland attempts to claw its way back from the death of the Celtic Tiger during the global financial crash of 2008, the divide between the classes has increased into a chasm. The pervading homeless crisis and the exacerbated social exclusion caused by this housing crisis is an example of this. The conclusion of this thesis asserts the importance of continually challenging narrative structures that imprison people

on the margins of society and condemn them to socially generated scarcity. This conclusion traces trends in the narrative structure of the plays of Bolger, Doyle, and Mercier (Chapters 3, 4,5 and 6) in more recent depictions of the working-class Northside, including *No Smoke Without Fire* (2005) by Paddy Murray, and the 2015 axis production of *The Good Father* (2006) by Christian O'Reilly. This concluding chapter will synthesise the exploration of philosophies of postcolonial thought, neoliberal ideology, constructions of narrative informing identity, and science of socially generated scarcity to interrogate tendencies to oppress or emancipate the othered working and lower classes of Northside Dublin in contemporary Irish Theatre.

Chapter 1

Independent Ireland, Theatre and Dublin Divided

> [C]ulture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another.
>
> (Said, 1994, p.xiv)

This chapter introduces the argument that within an independent, post-colonial, Irish state (1922-ongoing) national inferiority was replaced with class inferiority. While definitions of post coloniality are complex and fluid, insights from works by Edward Said (1994), Homi K. Bhabha (2004), David Lloyd (1999) and Declan Kiberd (1996) support an argument that it is precisely the residual influence of colonial practices and imperialist habits of mind that define class politics in the neoliberal social organisation of contemporary Ireland. Postcolonial concepts of 'otherness' and 'stereotype' generate systems of internal and external oppression, and subsequent chapters will develop points raised here. Specifically, the thesis will set out to expose and analyse instances within Irish theatre where alienation and 'otherness' occur and are resisted in the representation of the 'lower classes' of Dublin's capital city. A historical exploration of the role theatre has played in constructing an independent Irish national identity will be key to grasping the implications of these theatrical representations. The argument will draw on the work of esteemed scholars in Irish studies, including, Lionel Pilkington (2010), Nicholas Grene (1999), Chris Morash and Shaun Richards (2013). The processes involved in reimagining a nation to generate an image of an Irish ideal are explored to establish how, in Ireland in particular, theatre has been used to imagine a narrative of ideal Irishness. This narrative, and its associated imagery, generates an active sense of an inherited Irish culture that has shaped Ireland's political and economic

framework. So much so, that Morash and Richards can state that '[i]n Ireland, the role of theatre in producing the space of the imagined nation was both more central and more complex than that of either print or, indeed, broadcast media' (2013, p.17).

This chapter maps the nature and power of a vital cultural, political, social and economic distinction between the urban landscapes of North and South Dublin. Understanding and interrogating the physical terrain is essential to any serious attempt to understand the lived culture that has evolved on the Northside of Dublin. The physical landscape is interrogated, using the method of 'rhythmanalysis' proposed by Lefèbvre, to explore the practical effect this has had on the generation of culture, through the rhythms of everyday life. Collective rhythms produce ensembles, or cultures, as a kind of complex symphony moving between the internal (body/mind) and the external (social) world. The geography of the Northside of Dublin was produced in struggle, so understanding what forged these rhythms is essential, as each person on the Northside is affected by the interacting pressures which formed this space. Edward Said contends that;

> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.
>
> (1994, p.5)

Mapping the physical development of the Northside of Dublin in this way will enable the thesis to go on to explore how such philosophical implications play out in life and in theatre. The struggle for ideas, images and imaginings, just like the nationalist struggle of Ireland in its totality, is also felt on the Northside of Dublin in a class sense. This chapter emphasises how the physical landscape

of the Northside of Dublin has suffered as private, vested interests have extracted value from place and people, behind a façade of successive public policy decisions. In postcolonial critical terms, an image emerges of working-class Northsiders as a subordinate 'subject people' at the mercy of capitalist/neo-liberal Ireland.

Inventing Irish identity

In the opening minutes of his asks his stand-up DVD performance, *Live*, popular Irish comedian Tommy Tiernan, ; 'What does it mean to be Irish?' This seemingly simple question is extremely difficult to answer, as it raises multiple facets of Ireland's colourful and turbulent past. Tiernan suggests that it evokes, equally, a sense of national pride and notably shallow understanding:

> Everybody loves us, everybody wants to be Irish. 'Oh I'd love to be Irish', and I go 'Why?' and they go, 'I don't know, people expect you to be drunk, you've travelled the world, building things, living in cement mixers, it's a great life'. Most of us are fiercely proud of being Irish, aren't we, fiercely proud? [Audience cheer] Classic, classic, 'I'm Irish, wooo!' 'What does it mean?' 'Arrghhh… it means I'm not fucking English that's what it means.
>
> (Tiernan, 2002, *Live* DVD)

While overtly facetious, Tiernan's sketch touches upon the turmoil of Irish identity in the 20th and 21st century. His comedy trades on an assumption that the international stereotype of the inferior Irish drunk, the forced economic migration of generations of Irish people and the complexities of how these identities manifest in comparison to our closest neighbour and former coloniser, Great Britain, are all commonly known facets of Irish identity. Questions of Irish identity are so vividly part of popular culture, that it can be argued that, '[i]n addition to being the first "subject people" from the British Empire to win

independence in the twentieth century, the Irish may have invented identity politics' (Richard Tillinghast, 1998, p.341). Tillinghast suggests that centuries of British dominance and violent suppression of Gaelic characteristics generated so great a crisis of identity within the nation that a whole new genre of social science was created when Ireland gained independence from Britain in 1922. While this statement may appear grandiose it demonstrates the magnitude of the perceived effects that becoming a post-colonial republic had on the people of Ireland. It confers international significance on Irish experience, as its example set in train independence movements in a multitude of former colonies, which broke free of Empire throughout the 20th century (Tillinghast, 1998). In the years since gaining independence Ireland had been championed for little else. While the Free State established in 1922 became a Republic in 1949, when Ireland withdrew from the Commonwealth, the infant years of independence were not very prosperous for the Independent Ireland. By 1989 Irish historian and politician, Joseph J. Lee, labelled Ireland largely as a major failure in comparison to European standards, and Dublin, in particular, suffered by comparison to other European cities, on Lee's measures of living standards and urban development. Similarly, geographer Andrew MacLaran struggled to justify why a book on Dublin should be included in a series that explored world cities. He stated that 'it is a moot point whether Dublin can be really be called a 'world city' at all. Although it was the second city of the British Empire in 1800, it lost much of its significance during the subsequent century' (MacLaran, 1993, p.1).

The capital's loss of influence anticipated the country's condition once the colonial power was overthrown, demonstrating the enduring effects of colonial rule. Over decades post-independence, 'Between the date of the enactment of the Constitution and 1959, economic development was sluggish, trade remained stagnant and […] cultural activity was under political attack'

(Tom Garvin, 2014:111). A perceived lack of aptitude for self-governance and the sluggish nature of society in Ireland, post-independence worked to reinforce the oppressive ideology of colonialism:

> Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with such words and concepts as 'inferior' or 'subject races', 'subordinate peoples', 'dependency', 'expansion', and 'authority'.
>
> (Said, 1994, p.8)

It was precisely these complex ideological formations that worked to control a colonised nation and oppress the subject people of Ireland, not by external force or violence, but by something much more powerful, the internal oppression of the mind.

Manufacturing an image of the Irish as inferior to the British had been a commonplace throughout eight centuries of colonial rule. This was a common element of British colonial practice; however, unlike the subject people of other colonies under British imperial control the Irish did not have distinct racial features, such as skin colour, which were distinguishable on sight and therefore an easy signifier of difference. The method by which differentiation was made between 'superior' British and 'inferior' Irish referenced native practices, language and religion. In 'Inventing the pubs of Ireland: the importance of being postcolonial' (2007) Anthony Patterson and Stephen Brown insist that 'it is a sober fact that the native Irish were subject to centuries-long racism based not on skin colour but on analysis of their racial nature' (p.43). Domination by

colonial rule saw Gaelic practices and the use of the Gaelic language banned, British practices and the English language were enforced in their places. Homi K. Bhabha contends that the demarcation of difference is essential for the coloniser to dominate the colonial subject. Bhabha asserts that 'the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual' (2004, p.96). This asserted colonial ideology as superior and provided a marked difference between coloniser and colonised.

It is this practice precisely that helped maintain imperial power within colonies and embed the idea that colonised people required domination. In Bhabha's words 'it is a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization' (2004, p.96). If British people believe that the Irish are inferior and if systems are put in place that undermine indigenous Irish practices and generate a sense of native inferiority, then colonial power produces a false idea of colonial rule as a form of common sense, promoting a view that native people could not function on their own, and 'the colonized population is then deemed to be both the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation' (Bhabha, 2004, p.96). Following on from independence gained by physical force, the next battle which needed to be won on Irish soil, as Tiernan asserts, was an ideological one, a search for an Irish identity beyond colonial subjugation.

The Colonial Stereotype

> The first step for a colonised people in finding voice and an identity is to reclaim its dispossessed past.
>
> (Patterson and Brown, 2007, p.43)

This contention by Patterson and Brown echoes Said's statement that 'neither past nor present, any more than poet or artist, has a complete meaning alone' (1994, p.2). Contesting history events and opinions has preoccupied independent Ireland, not least in an ideological battle to decolonise the Irish mind, begun before the moment of partial national freedom. Nationalism's most favourable battleground was Irish drama and literature, and the imaginings of Ireland's writers and poets conjured an appealing vision of Ireland free from colonial rule. Such 'masterful images' (Yeats, 2000) conjured for people the shape of an independent imaginary,

> Robert Frost wrote of America. Where first there was the nation, and only later came the literature in Ireland it happened the other way around. Her poets first imagined the nation, and then it came into being […] It is hard to think of another nation for which literature plays the defining role it has played in Ireland.
>
> (Tillinghast, 1998, p.338)

Patterson and Brown argue that postcolonialism 'comprises a programme of resistance against cultural domination, part of which celebrates the indigenous approaches, perspectives and traditions suppressed or marginalised by colonial power' (2007, p.43). The task of renovating Irish culture, understood as tainted by colonial rule, was taken up by writers, poets and playwrights. It was through their writings that a means of subverting the internalised oppression generated by colonial inferiority was attempted. The decolonisation of Ireland was set in train by a return to myths and practices indigenous to Irish and a Gaelic way of living. This embodied profound local desires to challenge colonialism's derogatory stereotypes, which emerged as 'the driving force behind the Celtic revival of the late 19th century.' (Patterson and Brown, 2007, p.43-44).

W.B Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory were at the centre of documented history on resistance to colonial ideology. They attempted to revive the myths and legends of Ireland, returning to stories of ancient Irish warriors and moral Gaelic tales as a means of anchoring Ireland in a solid history that predated the British rule and the inferiority complexes generated by colonialism. According to Edward Said this had great mobilizing power for the Irish people: [W]hat Yeats does for the Irish past, with its Cuchulains and its great houses, [is] give the nationalist struggle something to revive and admire' (Said, 1994, p.17). The nationalist struggle attempted to rewrite history and this became a core preoccupation of some of Ireland's most prominent writers. The literary works of W.B. Yeats, and his early plays for the national theatre that he helped to establish, are largely devoted to the exploration of an Irish ideal.

Imagined characters, real identities: Irish theatre's role in forging identity

Lionel Pilkington (2001) argues that Irish theatre cannot be understood without understanding colonial and post-colonial Irish history. Equally, it has been argued that a good way of understanding the history of Ireland is through a study of Irish theatre, because 'performance texts make available unique and often unusual insights into the social, political, cultural and economic circumstances of the moments in which they are produced and reproduced' (Merriman in Luckhurst, 2010, p. 9). Theatre was the mechanism by means of which Yeats believed Ireland could best forge a new identity. He thought theatre could be communicated to the Irish masses and generate a civilised postcolonial nation that shunned its colonial past and forged a bright new future based on ancient Celtic myths and traditions:

> With its illuminated stage, darkened auditorium, naturalistic acting and – notionally at least – deferentially attentive audience, the theatre presented

> itself as a model for an ideal society. 'in the theatre, Yeats wrote in 1899, 'a mob becomes a people' (The Irish Literary Theatre' [1975] p/141).
>
> (Pilkington, 2001, p.5)

However, this proved a difficult task as the hold of Britain spanned almost a millennium and Yeats underestimated the idiosyncrasies of the Irish people as a whole. This mob that Yeats wanted to civilise consisted of a multitude of different classes and religions, peasants and protestants. Tillinghast argues that 'far from being home to an ethnically and religiously "pure" group, Ireland is in fact a melting pot' (1998, p.338), so that confining its people to a monocultural vision of Ireland was virtually impossible. Instead of generating a linear narrative that would unite a singular vision of Ireland, theatre highlighted the diversity of a nation accentuated by centuries of colonial rule, 'the theatre, it was thought, would help push Ireland forward into the modern. What worked out in practice was more complex, varied and disruptive' (Pilkington, 2010, p.8). The project of defining Ireland has continued into the 21st century and theatre lies at the heart of this struggle for definition. Chris Morash and Shaun Richards argue that contemporary Irish theatre draws upon the 'sense of place that has fuelled Irish theatrical production […] for more than a century' (2013, p.174). So much of Irish theatre is rooted in a sense of place to define or explore a sense of identity. As Tillinghast suggested that the Irish invented identity politics, the stage was a dominant form used to explore this.

Critical scholarship on modern Irish literature has drawn attention to a preoccupation with developing a 'pure', 'ideal' version of Irish culture throughout a turbulent century of post-colonial struggle. Tillinghast's survey contends that dominant themes of Irish writing break down, as follows:

> Modern literature in Ireland does concern itself with a succession of national issues: first the struggle for independence: then the definition of

> the new Irish state; relations with England and Englishness; the religious question; English Irish and that hybrid called Hiberno-English etc.; and postcolonial traits are certainly visible in the Irish character: ambivalence towards authority, a subversive attitude toward time, and the notorious Irish begrudgery which holds that, if he is one of us, he can't amount to much.
>
> (Tillinghast, 1998, p.338)

It is interesting to look at the trope of 'Irish begrudgery' through the lens of postcolonial discourse. The colonisation of the mind through inferiority complexes and attitudes - a function of colonial oppression - evolves into an attitude of insecurity and self-doubt during independence and serves as a measure of collective control. Patterson and Brown highlight the importance of the exploration of Irish identity following independence as an attempt to undo some of the harm caused by colonial rule. They emphasise that 'while historical excuses have been overused for many of Ireland's failures and shortcomings, the damage wrought to its national identity by its colonisers cannot be underestimated' (Patterson and Brown, 2007, p.43). The overlap of attitudes is inevitable and to some extent almost unavoidable as practices of everyday life have been forged in this rhythm. These past rhythms inform present and future rhythms of community and culture. This is elaborated by Edward Said when he states that 'the main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and, in the totally ideal sense […], each co-exists with the other' (Said, 1994, p.2). This is especially important to recognise when discussing Independent Ireland, and attempts by nationalists to shun the colonial past overlooked this point. Accepted constructions of the past have a direct role in framing our sense of our present as noted by Edward Said: 'how we formulate or represent the past

shapes our understanding and views of the present' (1994, p.2). In many senses the struggle for a unified Irish national identity that disregarded the colonial past, especially such a lengthy one as was the British colonisation of Ireland was a futile one. Despite this however, the drive of the nationalist struggle was toward shunning the colonial past and this became a dominant feature of the Irish national theatre, 'The Irish national theatre movement was an integral part of that broader cultural nationalism of the turn of the century which sought to create for a long-colonised Ireland its own national identity' (Grene, 1999, p.1). A general preoccupation with nationalist objectives within theatre and literature in Ireland worked to generate a culture that prioritised a singular mode of thought.

One of the powerful images contested by nationalists was that of the inferior Irish. While past rhythms and modes of thought around this subject morphed into self-effacing Irish attitudes, so too did the stereotype of the inferior Irish on stage morph into the stage Irishman. John Hargaden attributes some of the earliest appearance of the stage Irishman to Tyrone Power and his plays *O'Flannigan and the Fairies* and *Paddy Carey* in 1827 and 1833 respectively. (Hargaden, 1990, p.45). The 'view of the theatre as a modernising institution dominates the field of Irish theatre studies. Mostly unchallenged in the critical literature it gives rise to a way of thinking about the history Irish theatre as a developmental and improving cultural narrative' (Pilkington, 2001, p.6). The dominant view of Irish theatre as developmental overlooks the systematic replacement of the inferior Irishman by the inferior working-class Irishman, within the independent state. As is noted by Said:

> I want to underline the mobilizing power of the images and traditions brought forth, and their fictional, or at least romantically coloured, fantastic quality. Think what Yeats does for the Irish past, with its Cuchulains and its great houses, which give the nationalist struggle

> something to revive and admire. In post-colonial national states, the liabilities of such essences of Celtic spirit, *négritude*, or Islam are clear: they have much to do not only with the native manipulators, who also use them to cover up contemporary faults, corruptions, tyrannies, but also with the embattled imperial contexts out of which they came and in which they were felt to be necessary.
>
> (Said, 1994, p.17)

Assumptions of necessity that plague a colonial subject can, in contemporary history, also be mapped to class-based assumptions that 'lower' and working classes require domination because of an incapacity for autonomy or self-control. Lionel Pilkington demonstrates this projection of inferiority and its role in ideological control asserted by colonisation,

> [T]his is exactly the way colonial stereotypes work. Confronted by the prospect of a culture that appears different to the point of being incomprehensible or simply incommensurate, a colonial stereotype sets out to soothe and reassure the coloniser that everything about this other culture can be condensed into a single point: it is inferior' (2001, p.14).

Reducing a culture, race or character to a one-dimensional form of entertainment undermines any possible authority that culture, race or character could possibly have. It reduces the status of the subject and diminishes not only autonomy but also generates a view of incapacity and incompetence while bypassing larger issues of social planning and responsibility. Pilkington expertly articulates this when he says that

> [T]hinking of a class, ethnic group or nationality as innately performative tends to make light of its economic circumstances and of its political demands. […] the seriousness of any action is undermined by a double

> stigma: that it is really only pretence and that it is a form of self-enjoyment' (2001, p.7).

This reduction of cultural character and double stigma can be seen in the contemporary plays with which this thesis is concerned. Where the stigma is not explicit in play scripts, how the plays are received in theatre criticism, in some cases, indicates its presence.

This is especially important to the functioning of the neoliberalist project of the Celtic Tiger era and its aftermath, during which stigma generates a commodified stereotype of the working class. Just like other national products the image of the comic Irish stereotype is commodified for consumption. Pilkington argues that, 'the close link between Irish theatre and modernity also explains the historically close relationship between theatre and the state in Ireland and, more latterly, between theatre and big business' (2001, p.8). This commodification of Irish national identity is big business globally and, just like the Irish pub and other key Irish products, capitalises on an Irish emigrant population and its ancestors. Patterson and Brown asserts that, outside of Ireland,

> [T]he Irish [themed] pub draws millions of drinkers, accumulates large sums of capital, employs thousands of Irish ex-pats, is virtually everywhere [except Ireland], and acts, in concert with other prominent Irish products, like Guinness and *Riverdance*, as a signifier of Ireland's national myths and stereotypes (2007, p.42-43).

The contemporary reduction of Irish working-class identity repeats the colonial reduction of Irish identity, and the commodification of this reduced stereotype asserts modern Ireland's neo liberalist agenda.

For sale: the contemporary working-class stage Irishman

Roddy Doyle's writings offer many useful examples of this form of commodification of urban Irish identity. Doyle was described by Charles Foran as 'the most commercially successful Booker winner' (1996: p.60). His commercial success is owed to the commodification of the working-class Irish man, a figure which is principally associated with the Northside of Dublin. In interrogating Doyle's representation of working-class men and women, Pilkington is an important critical guide,

> Any discussion of plays presented on the Irish stage cannot be separated from consideration of these plays' relationship to alternative and competing traditions of popular drama and performance or, indeed, from consideration of other contemporary, non-institutional forms of theatrical expression or 'counter theatre'.
>
> (Pilkington, 2001, p.10)

This speaks precisely to the concern of this thesis to present an alternative critical analysis of popular drama and performance in Ireland, in order to challenge the dominant narrative. Pilkington explains that 'thinking about theatre in Ireland means expanding the critical frame in which theatre is understood' (2001, p.10). This is especially important in approaching the works of Roddy Doyle, who has garnered a distinct and popular profile as the voice of the working classes, especially in relation to Northside Dublin. The range of his creative output includes comic novels, films, and plays that could be categorised as popular theatre, understood as 'the practice of theatre as an expression of specific communities' stories, issues, knowledge and needs' (Prentki and Selman, 2000, p.8). Doyle specifically has been championed as a voice for the voiceless working classes of North Dublin, credited with sensitising the Irish public to issues previously ignored. While it is difficult to contest the argument that he has brought certain issues into public conversation, the specifics of the

forms of representation used require further analysis. When problematized through the postcolonial lens of subordinate races or classes a different picture emerges of the regurgitation of images of the stage Irishman as the contemporary working-class man. Pilkington asserts that 'the stage Irishman in general […] is never just himself: he is an assigned identity conjured up by a perception of Irishness as a whole' (2001, p.14). L. Perry Curtis Jr. in his seminal text *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (1997) traces back the stereotype of the Irishman in Victorian cartoon and warns of the 'serious implications' (Curtis, 1997, p.xxxiii) behind the humour. Curtis explains that 'caricature is, by definition, a distortion of reality; and so too is the stereotype (1997, p.xxxiv). The comedy of Doyle, and in some instances, the plays of Paul Mercier, present the working-class Dubliner in ways reminiscent of the buffoonery of the stage Irishman. As Pilkington notes, 'buffoonery or ancient idealism – what both versions have in common is their assumption of a single fixed identity that can be established as nationally representative and that is at a distance from the contemporary modernity of the audience' (2001, p.12). Indeed, this perspective resonates with Kersti Tarien Powell's contention that both of these writers belong a 'school of realism' that portrays the Northside. However, in stark contrast to Doyle's critical reception, Dermot Bolger's work has been categorised as conservative and bleak (Kiberd, 1996). From the perspective of this thesis, Bolger's plays reject an implied working-class inferiority of the working class. His plays challenge the notion of the working-class Dubliner as the direct cause of his/her own inadequacy or social difficulty, and present them rather as a product of his/her struggles with their social environment. The stereotype being presented with a sense of autonomy is a dissenting force in hegemonic structures, as 'the idea that the colonised subject is also a performer often functions in a manner that is profoundly unsettling for the coloniser, and for the postcolonial elites' (Pilkington, 2001, p.7). Through analysis of Bolger's plays it will be argued that the dominant criticism

surrounding his plays is produced as a response to the profoundly unsettling image of Ireland that he generates to challenge post-colonial imagery endorsed by local elites. Where Tillinghast declared that 'the stage Irishman – has only recently exited' (1998, p.338), this thesis will argue that the stage Irishman has not exited at all; he merely relocated – to the Northside of Dublin.

Faithful to the original Stage Irishman stereotype, the inferior working-class Dubliner, such as Charlo in Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (2001), 'is someone who is not worth knowing or understanding – someone who is innately belligerent, volatile, spoiling for a fight' (Pilkington, 2001, p.14-15). These characters are packaged as such for the entertainment of middle-class audiences, suppressing engagement with the complex social and economic conditions from which they emerge. Lionel Pilkington suggests that this has a cultural function, because 'what we deplore as innately inferior and negative in the Other […] is a projection of what we would much prefer not to acknowledge in ourselves: the violence of colonial rule' (2001, p.16). Despite attempts at generating an ideal identity post-independence the attitudes are simply displaced elsewhere, while 'many of the imperial attitudes underlying colonial conquest continue' (Said, 1994, p.17). In this case, it can be argued, that collective national inferiority was replaced by specific class inferiority as the independent state asserted its preferred form of social organisation. In the neoliberal context the violence is of the free market and capitalist ideology.

Dividing lines: postcolonial apathy, destruction North of the capital and Southside swelling

> My experience is that setting lingers. Character names and plot points often fade from memory over time, but what is seen on the stage to reflect the place and the time of the action seldom does.
>
> (Mannion, 2014, p.1)

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, Dublin has ranked low on the scale as a 'European City' (Lawton and Punch, 2014, p.864). The complexities of Ireland's post-colonial politics structured the urban development of the capital city, inscribing a geographical and cultural divide between north and south. The origins of this divide are difficult to explain with a simple binary yet their manifestations in popular culture play out as precisely that; an either/or situation whereby one is defined in comparison to the other, in extreme cases as a clash of grotesque stereotypes.

David Lloyd's statement that 'culture is all the nation has to distinguish it' (1999, p.98) applies equally to nucleated cultures generated by different communities in the same nation. It has been argued that a legitimate argument can be presented for the relevance of postcolonial theory to understanding Irish identities. However, a generally agreed, definitive, unitary, version of group identity is notoriously difficult, most likely impossible, to obtain. It has also been argued that literature and performance have had direct influence on the cultural development of Ireland since independence, especially in the case of Irish Theatre. A widely celebrated and frequently quoted passage from Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* highlights contemporary complexities around Irish relationships locally, nationally and internationally:

> The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.
> They nearly gasped; it was so true.
> An' Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin' everythin'. An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin.
> – Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud.
>
> (Jimmy Rabbitte in Roddy Doyle's' *The Commitments*, 1998, p.9)

Most analysis of this quotation treats it as a form of cultural commentary on assertions of Ireland's poorly viewed national economy, in a European context (Lee 1989, MacLaran 1993, Lawton and Punch 2014). A secondary focus of critical analysis has emphasised its connotations regarding Dublin's relationship to Ireland, in light of a rural/urban hierarchy generated through the cultural reshaping of the Gaelic revival of W.B Yeats, and in the cultural politics of Éamon de Valera. The implications of the final phrase, highlighting complex relationships within the boundaries of Dublin itself, have been relatively neglected. While Dublin has been acknowledged as a city of two halves (Kilfeather 2005, Paschal 1998, Pierse 2011), the origins of this disparity, how it is represented on the Irish stage, and the lived implications for the community represented, have never before been the focus of sustained academic discussion. In order to fully understand the complexities of the representation of north side Dublin and the dynamics of the Northside/ Southside stereotype it is imperative to offer a brief account of how this dividing line was drawn.

Erika Hanna exposes paradoxes structuring the development of Dublin, arguing that 'the reconstruction of the city was premised on modern values, but was also constructed as bringing the city closer to being a fitting capital for a new state based on an essentialized ideal of a pre-conquest Ireland '(2010, p.1018). However, while the specifics of geography are important in exploring how physical boundaries came to be, the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre and the method of rhythmanalysis offers a means to explore how these specifics then manifested in localised culture. This will involve identifying internal and external conditions, and how intersecting rhythms can then be perceived as features of identity. Lefebvre suggests that 'one can classify rhythms according to […] perspectives by crossing the notion of **rhythm** with those of **secret** and **public**, the external and internal' (Lefebvre, 2013, p.17). Examining the

rhythms of firstly the internal or 'secret' as referred to by Lefebvre is a way to then locate oneself in the public.

We have the ability to define our own daily rhythms by making comparison to other rhythms. Lefebvre explains that 'we know that a rhythm is slow or lively only in relation to other rhythms (often our own: those of our walking, our breathing, our heart)' (2013, p. 10). It is this notion of self in relation to other that generates firstly personal and secondly collective identity by associating with people with rhythms like our own. Lefebvre explicates that 'each of us has our preferences, references, frequencies; each must appreciate rhythms by referring to them to oneself, one's heart or breathing, but also to one's hours of work, or rest, of walking and of sleep' (2013, p. 10). Lefebvre importantly highlights the impact of 'hours of work, or rest, of walking and of sleep'. This is particularly relevant when discussing intracultural idiosyncrasies such as the eccentricities of Northside culture, the representation of the Northside Dubliner, and the representation of the rhythms of Northside culture which concern this thesis. An outline of social and physical boundaries put in place during the development of Dublin pre- and post-independence will be followed by an examination of how these changes manifested in the structure of the community, north of the city. This analysis is then used to critically discuss plays implicitly and explicitly set on the Northside of Dublin.

> By the opening years of the nineteenth century, Dublin comprised a compact and almost symmetrical city of 180,000 people. Almost two centuries of growth had resulted in its becoming the sixth largest city in Europe as well as being second city in Britain and Ireland.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.37)

One hundred years prior to the struggle for Irish independence, which took place at the beginning of the 20th century, Dublin had risen in the ranks of

European cities, achieving global significance as the second city of the British Empire. However, during the course of the 19th century the city fell into social and economic decline,

> Yet, within a period of merely 60 years, Dublin had been relegated to only the fifth most populous city in the UK, and by the end of the century it had even suffered the ignominy of having been overtaken by Belfast (Daly, 1984). Dublin's growth had been based on its functions as the seat of the national government and of the ruling class, as an entrepot and financial centre, and the possession of significant subsidiary industrial functions were adversely affected by changing economic and political conditions. Indeed, a major sector of the city's industrial economic base collapsed almost entirely during the early decades of the nineteenth century.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.37-38)

These intense economic and political changes significantly affected the symmetry of the population of Dublin during the 19th century producing disparities between north and south of the city, as those with means chose to relocate south of the city and into suburbia at the base of the Dublin mountains. MacLaran concludes that 'during the nineteenth century, the symmetrical growth which had characterised previous centuries was broken by marked linear extensions, particularly southwards' (1993, p.42). A stark example of this Southside swelling of prosperous citizens could been seen in Rathmines, just south of the Grand Canal (MacLaran, 1993, p. 42). The Northside, on the other hand, which had benefitted from extensive property development during the Georgian era, suffered from Ireland's 19th century decline. Georgian buildings that had once been occupied by the middle and upper classes fell into disrepair, as their wealthy occupants opted to relocate on the opposite side of the Liffey,

> throughout the eighteenth century, the north inner city was home to some of Dublin's most impressive streetscapes. […] this rapid development was halted at the end of the eighteenth century. Fashion moved south of the river, and by the mid-nineteenth century, many of the houses in the locale had been subdivided into tenements
>
> (Hanna, 2010, p. 1019).

Joseph O'Brien, in his book *"Dear, Dirty Dublin": A City in Distress, 1899-1916,* echoes this position. O'Brien adds that 'by the [19th] century's end all these areas – "the real boast of the city" – had become the sites of tenements and lodging houses' (1982, p. 14). Rathmines, by contrast, became a flourishing independent township in 1847 (O'Brien, 1982, p.14) with the interests of the middle and upper classes prioritised over those of its lower income residents,

> although the township did include a large pre-existing working-class district at Irishtown and Ringsend, the standards of development which were stipulated, and the level of the rates ensured that little new development took place for the lower middle class. Development therefore slackened after 1880.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.44)

The arbitrary development of affluent townships ensured the prosperity of the area which it maintained even as it was absorbed into the city during the early 20th century, while marked political and economic changes took place in Ireland. 'The district, absorbed by the city as late as 1930, has retained its status into the modern era, being adopted as the heart of Dublin's embassy belt' (MacLaran, 1993, p.44). The construction of urban infrastructure during the late 20th century both emphasised and contributed to disparities within the population and divisions between haves and have nots became further

embedded in the physical landscape either side of the River Liffey. MacLaran emphasises that the first tram service, open in 1872, connected Rathmines to the city centre. Only when the needs of the upper echelons were met did the Rathmines township become more accessible to the lower income demographic, however, despite this Rathmines still, currently, commands a certain cachet within the boundaries of the capital. In the latter decades of the 20th century the focus of development on the Southside of the city focused on 'high class' professionals and business people (MacLaran, 1993, p.43), while the Northside was experiencing a stark contrast in fortunes.

In her 2010 article 'Dublin's North Inner City, Preservationism, And Irish Modernity In The 1960s' Erika Hanna presents an interesting position on the development, or lack thereof, of Dublin's north inner city in the late 20th century, precisely the 1960s, and the multifarious decision making processes and intricate political agendas to which the low income tenants of the tenements were exposed. She pointedly explains the significance of urban development in Ireland's late blooming modernity of the 60s,arguing that,

> a consideration of the debates over Dublin's Georgian streets provides a productive alternative perspective to ongoing debates around the nature of Irish society in the post-war years; Irish modernity; and the complex relationship between civil society, local government, and property speculation in the evolution of the city (Hanna, 2010, p.1019).

Irish modernity is generally understood to have emerged in the 1960s when newly appointed Taoiseach Seán Lemass took the helm in Irish politics. His name 'is widely associated with the transformation of Irish life that began under his stewardship between 1959 and 1966' (Girvin, 2013, p.406). Lemass raised questions regarding the Irish constitution, the Catholic Church that under De Valera had been embedded in Irish society through the 1937 constitution, and also Ireland's economic relationship with Europe, particularly membership of

the E.E.C. With a penchant for intervention, Lemass rocked the post-war boat that attempted to embed a pre-colonial, Gaelic ideal and he attempted to catapult Ireland into the modern era. This had a profound effect on the urban development of the Northside, and '[t]he city, caught between multiple conceptions of modernization and tradition, became a forum where the anxieties and opportunities of Irish life in the 1960s were exposed and debated' (Hanna, 2010, p.1019). The postcolonial attitudes that shunned Ireland's time as a colony resisted maintaining or salvaging any of the architecture that belonged to a time of colonisation. This was particularly visible on the Northside. Hanna notes that 'modern values embedded in changes to the city had unique significance in Ireland. The demolition of eighteenth-century streetscapes was described by property speculators and the government as the 'reconquest' of the city which had once been the nucleus of British rule' (2010, p.1018). The city was undergoing enormous change at this time, and entire streetscapes were demolished in order to be reconstructed within the frame of modern ideology and as an attempt to project an image of Dublin as a successful, independent, capital in its own right (Hanna, 2010, p.1018). Private investment, in keeping with the established pattern, focused south of the city during this reconstruction, with degenerative consequences for the Northside. The crescendo of events since Dublin's unseating as second city of the Empire at the turn of the 19th century and the attitude of the Gaelic ideal that dominated independence until the mid-20th century had left it ravaged. By the time Lemass became Taoiseach, the Northside of Dublin was in a state of emergency. From the late 19th century Dublin had been experiencing a housing crisis in the city centre. Not enough dwellings were available and the accommodation that was available was highly unsuitable as dilapidation and dangerous conditions were rife. Dublin Corporation was established in the 13th century, restructured in the late 19th century and, again in 2002, when it was renamed Dublin City Council. Attempts from the private sector to intervene in the problem were a failure and Dublin

Corporation took control of managing housing conditions for the working classes:

> The activities of the philanthropists clearly demonstrated that there could be no private sector solution to the housing problems of the poor. Inevitably, yet haltingly, Dublin Corporation became involved not only in demolishing slums but in the development of housing for the working classes.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.47)

Despite these schemes the conditions of housing for the working classes deteriorated further. Prior to the war of independence attempts had been made to tackle this housing crisis: 'By 1914, the Corporation had developed 1,385 houses and apartments, yet there was still an estimated shortage of 14,000 dwellings in the city' (MacLaran, 1993, p.47). Despite these efforts, the majority of the first half of the century saw little by way of a solution to the housing crisis and tragically 'tenement collapse remained all too common in the decades that followed' (Fallon, 2013). In 1963 further tenement collapses occurred within weeks of each other at Fenian Street and Bolton street, killing children and elderly with several others injured. The reaction to this was one of panic and exasperation at the problem and the resulting response had a significant effect on the wider landscape to the north and east of Dublin. In the year and a half following the documented deaths on Fenian Street and Bolton Streets more than 1000 homes were destroyed in the North inner city due to unsuitability. Collective panic significantly and rapidly effected the working and lower classes and this period of shock produced changes in policies and procedures that left them at the mercy of bureaucracy:

> Longstanding residents were swiftly removed in a panicked fashion; notices were nailed on doorways informing residents that the buildings

> were condemned and they must leave within seven days. The Sanitary Services Act also allowed landlords who had previously not been receiving an economic return on their property due to the provisions of the Rent Restrictions Act to remove longstanding tenants, clearing newly expensive sites of uneconomic buildings and their inhabitants, ready to be redeveloped as offices.
>
> (Hanna, 2010, p.1021)

The commercial dislocation of Northside residents led to an even bigger problem of housing, one which, it was determined, required a drastic response: the 'large scale sub-urbanisation of the working classes' (MacLaran, 1993, p.48). Although this met with resistance from within the Corporation, it became the accepted policy solution to the crisis. During the beginning of the latter half of the 20th century the development of public housing was primarily focused on the Northside of Dublin. Sub-urbanisation spanned North through the landscape towards Dublin airport and the townlands that stretched to County Louth,

> In the 1950s, large-scale public housing development took place at Artane and Ballyfermot, and by 1959, nearly 45 percent of the 42,360 dwellings built in Dublin since World War II had been developed by the public sector. During the next decade, public housing covered a wide area of countryside to the north of the city stretching from Finglas and Ballymun to Coolock.
>
> (MacLaran,1993, p.49).

City dwellers were relocated to newly developed satellite towns that were underdeveloped and lacked amenities. The planning process of this sub-urbanisation lacked clear vision or social consciousness. Hanna notes that 'no town plan was instituted at all until 1971. As a result, the impact of Corporation policy tended to be random, arbitrary, and speculative, while urban renewal was

deferred to private interests' (2010, p.1022). In combination, these features were a direct cause of the collapse of urban structure within the city boundaries, exacerbating an already marked and obvious urban divide,

> Private sector residential construction tended to avoid those areas being developed by public housing. The southern and eastern fringes, with their access to countryside and coast, became particularly popular with middle-class residents. Expansion took place around existing settlements at Donnybrook, Blackrock, Dun Laoghaire and Dundrum. [...] After World War II, speculative residential developers continued to favour the southern periphery and were the major actors in the development of a broad zone running from Rathfarnham, Churchtown and Dundrum through Stillorgan to Deans Grange and Killiney.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.49)

Indiscriminate attitudes to urban planning and dislocation and relocation of the working and lower classes generated an increasingly lower income Northside, rife with the usual issues that result from lower income such as anti-social behaviour and criminality. This was especially evident during the 1980s when Ireland experienced a wave of drug abuse. In her article, 'Illicit Drug Use in Ireland: An Overview of the Problem and Policy Responses' Aileen O'Gorman explores the increased issue of drug use in Ireland and the areas most affected, contending that 'such problematic drug use has been found to be concentrated in Dublin's inner city areas and outer estates where poverty, multi-generational unemployment, high population density (particularly of young adults), and poor facilities are the norm' (1998, p. 155). The crisis of housing and development for the lower income citizens of Ireland remains a pressing issue in 2018. The crash of 2008 exacerbated the homeless situation in Ireland and as a result similar panicked and rash processes are being put in place to attempt to curb the issue; the modular housing project in 2016 is an example of this.

(www.dublincity.ie/rapid-build-housing-modular-housing-information-update-march-2nd-2016) These modular homes will be based in the same local authority locations that were thought to be the solution to the problem back in the 1960s. A cynical position would predict that similar issues that had not yet been alleviated will once again be accelerated. The complexities of nationalistic thought post-independence, the attempts to modernise Ireland while prioritising private interests, and hasty responses to public crisis have worked against Dublin's cohesion,

> The twin forces of the compulsory powers of civic governance and arbitrary destruction by private interests led to the collapse of urban structure in many western European and American cities. In Ireland, however, this post-war phenomenon took on uniquely parochial overtones, due to the fact that Dublin was positioned within Irish history as a colonial capital, built by a foreign elite.
>
> (Hanna, 2010, p.1022)

In many ways colonial dominance over the Irish people has evolved during independence as a neoliberal recolonising of the Irish poor.

Planning processes and procedures adopted in Ireland since independence, while well-meaning in some instances, have been inconsistent, problematic and have obtained a reputation for being unnecessarily difficult for Dublin citizens;

> from its origins, bursting with enthusiasm, the planning system has been turned into a mere bureaucratic procedure which is held in disregard by developers and community groups alike. To the former it represents a costly and unnecessary bureaucratic obstacle which has to be overcome, while community groups regard it as difficult to penetrate and unresponsive to local needs.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.79).

As is seen in the example of Rathmines, a favouring of capital over social development has been a feature of urban planning and construction in Ireland. Attempts to address this system failure have been shunned in contemporary political history in Ireland,

> the passage of amending legislation to close loopholes in the system has been mysteriously low on the political agenda. Yet simultaneously, for the sake of legitimacy, the state has tried to ensure that planning possesses an appearance of being open to public participation. In reality, this tends to be a very superficial veneer.
>
> (MacLaran, 1993, p.80).

The influence of this problematic approach shaped the recent large-scale regeneration of Ballymun on the far north suburb of Dublin city centre. Though the physical restructuring of the area has been halted and the project officially labelled 'finished' the initially promised regeneration Masterplan (1997) remains unfinished and the centre of the town has been left dismantled. The insistence on attracting outside investment rather than promoting growth from inside the community during this regeneration plan is to the detriment of the local people. Ballymun was built as one of the original responses to the housing crisis of the 1960s in Dublin, as discussed by Irish Times journalist Donal Fallon in his article 'The tenement crisis in Dublin, 1963' (2013, Online). Fallon states that 'the Ballymun Housing Scheme and other such plans […] were, in a way, a response to the urgency of the problem in Dublin city centre' (2013). The regeneration is discussed further in chapter 2 it is as an example of the use of social housing communities on the Northside at the whim of neoliberal poilices in urban planning.

From this reading of MacLaran and Hanna it is evident that the Northside of Dublin has suffered from uneven and often corrupt urban planning to the

detriment of residents, especially those who are categorised as the lower and or working classes. High-rise Ballymun was an experimental project at the time which ignored the failings of similar European models in order to apply a quick fix to the escalating housing problems in the city. This urban experiment also fell in to disrepair during the late 20th century and by the end of the 1990s it was proposed that Ballymun would be completely demolished and rebuilt. This regeneration will be discussed in depth in the following chapter as my experience of growing up in Ballymun prior to, and during Europe's largest urban regeneration informed the rhythms of my everyday life and provided me a perspective located, both literally and figuratively, in the margins of the city.

Chapter 2

Finding my Voice: Ballymunners Rob Your Runners

Whose voice can you hear?
Who calling down the stair?
What ghost trapped in a lift shaft?
What child who played and laughed?

(Dermot Bolger, 2010, p.xviii)

These words echoed along Ballymun main street. I heard my own voice booming them through the speaker while a man, whose name I never learned, beat a drum. I was unsure when, exactly, the beats were the drum or my own heartbeat as strange faces mixed with faces of my neighbours and teenagers I went to school with, stared up at me from the darkness. It looked like they were hung on my every word and I willed myself to keep their eye contact whenever it was my turn to say a line. I thought of the advice of the director while trying to remain spontaneous and in the moment. The air felt electric, hitting every beat and moving seamlessly between Derek and Máire. Even now, over a decade later I can remember that electricity so vividly. Thomas McDermott tower loomed behind me, protectively. The tower blocks made me feel safe, they were home. But now the windows were dark and it was hard to tell if the moving shadows were the builders taking their cue to light the symbolic lamps as we incanted the story of Ballymun, or if we were indeed conjuring up the past while hopefully, and fearfully looking towards the future.

My account of The Wake *July 9th 2004*

In 2004 I was offered my first professional acting contract with axis Arts and Community Resource Centre in Ballymun, Dublin. I performed Dermot Bolger's *Ballymun Incantation*, as part of a trio of performers, during a day-long outdoor festival called *The Wake* on July 9th 2004. The *Ballymun Incantation* was the pinnacle of a day of performances to mark the beginning of the demolition of the iconic, and notorious, Ballymun tower blocks. As Dermot Bolger states in the foreword to his *Ballymun Trilogy*:

> The casting was significant in mapping out how we intended to go on. There was Máire Ní Gráinne, the acclaimed actress, who had given a lifetime of service to the Abbey Theatre; the teenage Ballymun actress Kelly Hickey, who represented the emerging local talent being nurtured

> by Axis in Ballymun and would later star in *Townlands of Brazil*; and, finally, there was the late Derek Fitzgerald, a dynamic and forceful Ballymun community activist.
>
> (2010, p.xiv)

This was the beginning of my professional acting career, an opportunity born of a social arts movement during Europe's largest urban regeneration project. This chapter will explore this regeneration; the history of Ballymun, the reason the regeneration was proposed, and the role of the arts in the social regeneration in a suburb of Dublin that has become synonymous with deprivation and social failure. The reason for this is to cognitively map my experience growing up and becoming a performer in a shifting physical and political landscape and develop what political geographer Edward W. Soja, in his book *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, describes as 'the critical eye – or the critical I' (1989, p.11). As Soja conveys, it is the ability to make social comparisons and to the ability reflect on this that creates a 'practical theoretical consciousness that sees the lifeworld of being creatively located not only in the making of history but also in the construction of human geographies' (Soja, 1989, p.11). The term 'cognitive mapping' is usually attributed to the philosopher Fredric Jameson; however, this thesis focuses on the concept in relation to Kevin Lynch's usage of the term in his 1960 publication *The Image of the City*. Jameson himself states that this work by Lynch 'spawned the whole low-level sub discipline that today takes the phrase "cognitive mapping" as its own designation' (Jameson in Nelson and Grossberg, 1988, p.353). This chapter uses Lynch's approach of creating an image of the environment looking at Ballymun through initial composition and the regeneration. It is influenced by Lynch's method of exploring legibility, image, structure, identity and imageability of the environment to cognitively map the location (Lynch, 1960, p1-13). This chapter focuses on my developing critical eye/ critical I in the exploration of Ballymun in these terms. By acknowledging my position and Ballymun's place on the margins of society I am able to interrogate the creative location of geographies of neoliberalism that socially generate margins.

To develop the critical eye/I described by Soja, a methodology, that Gerry Smyth in his influential text *Space, and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (2001) calls 'Homework', is employed. Homework focuses on cognitively mapping the area I was born and raised in, Ballymun. Smyth notes that 'one of

the direct effects of rapid political and economic change in the late twentieth-century Ireland was a focus on individual and community experience' (2001, p.23). One of the effects of my professional acting opportunities was the beginning of my awareness of the human geographies of Dublin and how the perception and representations of my local community impacted on me as the individual. It is hard to pinpoint an exact moment when I began to cognitively map my hometown but my experience working professionally with axis, performing in Bolger's plays and living through a dramatic upheaval of my local environment, generated a consciousness that is in line with the thinking articulated by Smyth in *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*:

> Some of the questions asked by people across the island at the end of the old millennium included: How did I get to be the person I believe myself to be? What political, sociological or historical factors influenced my development? What role did the state and official state ideology play? What lifestyle options were available and unavailable to me, and by virtue of whose decision was this so? In what kind of a place did I come to consciousness, and how did it get to be the way it was? Do I celebrate or regret its passing, and the passing of the way of life with which I associate it? Am I somebody?
>
> (Smyth, 2001, p.94)

It is precisely my experience of living through Ireland's most ambitious urban social project which makes Smyth's methodology of Homework appropriate to my attempt in this chapter to articulate the positionality from which I generate an original critical analysis of representations of my native Northside. My personal story overlaps with the peak time of a rapid political and economic development of Ireland beginning in 1986, by which time 'Ballymun stood in ruins, a utopian project that had become an icon of the failure of modernist planning' (Boyle, 2005, p.184). However, as the Irish economy grew in the early 1990s Ballymun became the site of 'Europe's largest urban regeneration project' (Boyle, 2005, p.183), and, as such, may be analysed as a microcosm of the neoliberal capitalist agenda adopted by the Irish state. Growing up in Ballymun I lived through a physical, economic and perceived social regeneration in Ireland that was on a scale that was unique not only in Ireland but also in Europe. Mark Boyle's critical analysis of the regeneration supports

this argument: 'Ballymun emerged as one of the most visible icons of the gap that was beginning to grow between those who were able to jump on the tail of the Tiger and those who were being crushed beneath its feet' (2005, p.188). The shifting landscape of Ballymun is where I forged my critical eye/I.

As the area declined, Ballymun garnered a notorious reputation, and became synonymous with deprivation and failed urban planning (MacLaran, 1993; Power, 1997; Prichard, 2000, 2008). The landscape was defined by iconic tower blocks and spine block flat complexes. David Prichard, the lead designer and visionary of the Ballymun regeneration, states that these complexes were 'constructed on open fields on the edge of the city, beyond the 1930s to 1950s sprawl where radial routes out of Dublin dissolved into the countryside' (2000, p. 65). I was born in Ballymun, and, for twenty years, I was a resident of the high-rise flats. Appropriate cognitive mapping requires the analyst to appropriate their own social position to analyse wider societal structures. My experience forging a sense of self in a place that had 'become known for its roaming horses and as the setting for Roddy Doyle novels' (Prichard, 2000, p. 65) will be crucial in positioning the critical perspective of this thesis within a wider framework in Irish Studies.

Firstly, I discuss and problematise an overview of the Ballymun regeneration to place the formation of my own identity in context. Utilising an extensive study on social housing by Anne Power (1999), I explore the historical context of the development, decline, and subsequent regeneration of Ballymun. I critique and analyse the vision articulated both by David Prichard, and Ciarán Murray (director, Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL)). BRL is the independent company set up by Dublin Corporation (now Dublin City Council) to design, implement and complete the regeneration of Ballymun. The analysis is informed by Kieran Allen's (1999, 2000, 2002, 2012) critical analysis of increasing social exclusion in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years. Doreen Massey's (2005) analysis of space and place and the understanding of these concepts within neoliberal world cities is also utilised to problematize the political framework within which the Ballymun regeneration was undertaken. Thirdly, a cognitive map of the shifting Ballymun landscape is explored to analyse the distinct social structures of Ballymun that contribute to Northside culture (Chapter 1). The discussion critiques the position of the Northside within Dublin's hegemonic structures, exposing the 'superficial veneer' (MacLaran, 1993, p. 80) of public participation in urban planning in Ireland.

Finally, I discuss the role of theatre in transcending boundaries of place, space and culture. I draw on Ciaran Benson's *The Cultural Psychology of Self: Place, Morality and Art in Human Worlds* (2001) to emphasise the importance of conceptions of place in structuring cultural identities, personal and collective. In parallel with this broader work of contextualisation, I explore the detail of my experiences performing in Ballymun-themed plays by Dermot Bolger, as part of an initiative of the axis Arts and Community Resource Centre in Ballymun to achieve its mission of 'inclusion and excellence' (http://www.axisballymun.ie/about-us/what-we-do). The combined result locates my perspective as peripheral to Irish culture, demonstrating the marginalisation of Northsiders in Dublin through the physical and social development of the Northside, developing the argument put forth in chapter 1.

Critique of Europe's largest urban regeneration project (1965 – 1998)

Built in response to the inner-city housing crisis in Dublin of the 1960s, (Chapter One), Ballymun became Ireland's first and only high-rise housing estate (Whelan (2003), Power (1999), Prichard (2000). Ciarán Murray (Director, BRL; 1997-2010), acknowledged that the pressures of the housing crisis of the 60s had a direct impact on the planning and design of the high rise Ballymun estate. The planning and administration of the Ballymun estate was hasty and Murray states that 'following a speedy tendering process a four-year contract for the planning, development and construction of the Ballymun estate was signed on the 2 February 1965' (in McCrann, 2008, p. x). While Ballymun was initially a symbol of Ireland's late blooming modernity, the steep decline of the estate is well documented in both academic and public discourse. *Estates on the Edge: The Social Consequences of Mass Housing in Northern Europe* (1997, 1999) by Anne Power, is a seminal text. In her extensive project on social housing, Power selected and compared Ballymun, Les Minguettes (France), Kolnberg (Germany), Broadwater Farm Estate (UK), and Taastrupgaard (Denmark) as five key sites in which to investigate the social consequences of large-scale public housing schemes throughout Europe. Originally published in the 1997 and reprinted with amendments in 1999, the project provides a retrospective analysis of almost three decades of Ballymun history and the tumultuous events that led to the proposal for the demolition of the flats and the 1997 masterplan for its regeneration.

Power illustrates the optimism generated by the initial construction of Ballymun, and the promise of the estate as a solution to the extreme housing crisis being experienced by the poorest Irish citizens at the time:

> Over half the 2814 flats had three bedrooms and the eventual population of Ballymun was between 15 000 and 20 000. In 1966, when the first tenants moved in, often from slum clearance areas of poor inner-city terraced housing, the estate was pristine, with its gleaming white towers and 'spine' blocks, 73 lifts, ultra-modern district heating system, wide open grass areas – nearly 500 acres – and its proud new inhabitants.
>
> (Power, 1999, p.241)

Following the collapse of slum tenements in the inner-city Dublin there was immense pressure to find a large-scale solution to housing those on lower income. This pressure 'culminated in the collective decision in May 1964 to follow the UK and European model, in vogue at the time, for procuring public housing by adopting the low cost, quick-fix solution of prefabricated, system built, high rise housing' (Murray, 2008, p. x). Ballymun's high-rise design, known as the 'Balancey industrialised system' (Power, 1999, p.241) of accommodation was chosen as meeting such pressing criteria. Balancey's prefabricated style allowed rapid development of a vast number of dwellings in a short period of time, and the original construction of Ballymun flats took merely three years. In pursuing a 'quick fix' approach to a major emergency planners ignored the previous failure of similar developments in the UK and Europe (see Power, 1996, 1997, 1999), and Ireland's experiment was not to end well. This was largely due to mismanagement: Power emphasises that 'from the outset, the management of Ballymun was a problem […] Co-ordination and supervision on the ground was almost non-existent' (1999, p.242). It can be argued that resentful Irish attitudes toward people in poverty and the social housing they needed, framed the tenants of the Ballymun estate as society's Others, existing outside 'normalcy', effects still prevalent in contemporary Irish society. The Irish Department of Environment (DoE) stated in 1991 that:

> Public housing caters for that section of the population unable to provide adequate housing from its own resources… those unable to exercise this responsibility depend upon local authorities to meet their housing needs...
>
> (in Power, 1999, p.241)

This reveals an institutionalised attitude in Ireland towards low-income families reliant on social housing. The pejorative phrasing suggests that 'that section' of society shirks away from an implied social responsibility, thus obscuring, rather than acknowledging, a wider system of political economy that generates poverty in pockets of society. What is rarely 'mentioned, is that the (lower and working class) is integrally a part of a larger economic process and, more importantly, that it serves the living standard and the comfort of the more favoured community' (Galbraith, 1992, p.31). By ignoring this, the DoE effectively denies a system that promotes inequality among people on low incomes. The responsibility for low income is attributable to economic relations that actively serve the more economically fortunate. People who had been relocated from the slums of the inner city, for example, vacated city centre sites for opportunistic commercial development. The physical transformation of the inner city as a centre of commerce took place as soon as the urban poor were relocated to the green fields of Ballymun. In stark contrast, development of supporting infrastructure and local amenities for the relocated communities was painfully slow, and proved dramatically inadequate. Galbraith states that 'the economically fortunate, not excluding those who speak with the greatest regret of the existence of this class, are heavily dependent on its presence' (1992, p.31). An attitude of superiority associated with private house ownership in Ireland further undermined perceptions of the Ballymun estate. Living in flat complexes was extremely unpopular, and those with even limited means were encouraged to vacate flats by government initiatives, such as surrender grants, which promoted home ownership:

> Without doubt, the greatest damage was done in 1985 with the establishment of the national Surrender Grand Scheme. In an effort to encourage greater private ownership of housing in Ireland, this scheme paid IR£5,000 to citizens who were prepared to move out of the state sector. Almost immediately, the most able residents of the Ballymun community left the area, including those in employment and those that served as its leaders.
>
> (Boyle, 2005, p.187)

A strong, and obvious, bias against houses regulated by Dublin Corporation, further isolated tenants of Ballymun flats, and generated a view of the area as a community of the poorest and most 'problematic' tenants,

> Inevitably the priority for the houses went to more established, more stable tenants. As people moved out empty flats became harder and harder to let. The people left behind in this process were poorer and less favoured economically and socially.
>
> (Power, 1999, p.245).

This worked to generate a collective aspiration to home ownership and created a mass abandonment of the Ballymun estate by stable tenants. As their exodus accelerated, more and more flats became vacant and these dwellings were used to house the city's neediest; creating a concentrated underclass. Single men, lone parents and homeless people were relocated to the area:

> Standards of service plummeted, as the city increasingly used Ballymun to take the weight of mounting social problems. Although Ballymun was less than 10 per cent of the city's council stock, it housed 45 percent of the city's single parents, 29 percent of the homeless and 59 percent of the single male applicants. Many of these were discharged from institutions [and] had a long history of instability.
>
> (Power, 1999, p.246)

The combined result of these actions from the Dublin Council and Irish government was that Ballymun became heavily stigmatised, and 'only very low income and relatively vulnerable people aspired to Ballymun' (Power, 1999, p.249). While these facts and figures paint a bleak picture of the Ballymun estate and its inhabitants, local residents refused to accept their abject poverty and the mismanagement of the estate. Residents groups pressurised the local authority on a number of issues, from the loss of a bank in the town centre to flats being left vacant, attracting unwanted anti-social behaviour. These activist groups gained critical mass when, in response to the closure of the only bank branch in Ballymun (1984), the Ballymun Community Coalition, which, 'over the following years was to change the tide of events in Ballymun' (Power, 1999, p.247), was formed. The high concentration of the most vulnerable in Irish society in Ballymun could arguably categorise the people as an underclass, but, despite this, Ballymun locals collectively demanded that 'Dublin Corporation adopted a radical new management approach to Ballymun' (Power, 1999, p.247). The Corporation (or 'Corpo' as it was known to residents locally) was forced to change policies of excluding residents from committee meetings, adopting instead processes to include and liaise with them regarding change and

betterment of the estate. It was during this time that a solution was sought to the decaying estate, and following a pilot refurbishment of the Balbutcher area (six spine blocks and one tower named Joseph Plunkett) the controversial decision was made in 1994 to demolish the majority of the flat complexes in Ballymun. It was argued that the cost of refurbishment was too great and did not solve the complex problems, and that residents should be rehomed in newly built houses. While Power notes that this generated a media furore with demands for justification for the cost of demolition, by 1997 the government published plans for the whole high-rise estate of Ballymun to be demolished and replaced with conventional houses.

Personal Testimony

The prospect of a 'conventional house' split my household. My mother was thrilled by the idea. She was born and had grown up in a conventional house in the UK before my Irish grandparents relocated back to Ireland under difficult economic circumstances. They obtained a flat by squatting in a block in Balcurris, an area of Ballymun, in 1979 and were eventually officially given a flat due to squatters' rights in the same area in 1980. My mother had always thought of a house as an aspiration and made plans for her newly proposed garden. She was elated that she would have a kitchen big enough for a dining table, as the galley kitchen in the flats did not accommodate this. I, on the other hand, was extremely apprehensive. I had only ever known high rise living and the prospect of my front door being on ground level was intimidating. I found the implication that we were going to be like the rest of the country difficult, as if we were outside of normalcy for living in the flats. While at the time I was never quite sure if this feeling was mere paranoia, researching for this thesis confirmed my initial feelings when I read the words of David Prichard, the lead designer of the regeneration project: 'we imagined they were tired of being surveyed, did not want to be conspicuous and probably dreamed of being like the rest of North Dublin' (2008, p.3). We were given the choice of three area preferences for our new house and asked if we wanted an apple or a pear tree in our garden. There were two choices for the colour of the new kitchen cupboards. We were part of phase three, and after a two-year delay, the brown trucks came to pick up our stuff at the end of August 2006. I had seen the brown trucks move hundreds of people during the first two phases. It felt surreal when my flat was empty, and the walls echoed the sound of my voice and our footsteps. I looked over my sixth floor balcony one last time, at the distant

horizon. I used to watch the sunsets with my Nanny and adored that I could see for miles. Now that the flats are demolished I look to the empty space, suspended in the sky, where my childhood memories were made.

> It is sometimes said that masterplans are led by vision, commerce or process. I believe all three drivers are needed, and it is the appropriate balance that matters.
>
> (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p. 1)

The masterplan for the complete regeneration of Ballymun was announced in 1998. Ten years later, the head of BRL, Ciarán Murray, stated that it had 'adopted a brave approach to redevelopment, retaining all the existing residents while rebuilding the town and putting in place all the social and economic infrastructure necessary to sustain the community' (in McCrann, 2008, p. ix). The Masterplan which proposed the large-scale demolition and rehousing of the Ballymun residents on the same site was hailed as a courageous attempt at social inclusion in the provision of public planning. As MacLaran pointed out (Chapter 1), social inclusion in public planning in Ireland, in recent decades, had been seen as a 'superficial veneer' lacking meaningful public participation. The proposed masterplan to regenerate Ballymun, however, was claiming to be able to achieve this social inclusion in very real terms. Rather than a residential development the regeneration of Ballymun was envisaged as a large scale, and very ambitious, social project:

> The ambition for the project was encapsulated in one sentence of the press release which read 'The Aim of this major social project is to get Ballymun working as a town which caters for all local needs and attracts public and private investment, provides employment and secures a better mix of housing in a rejuvenated physical environment.'
>
> (Murray in McCrann, 2008, p. x-xi)

Ballymun locals had driven the pursuit of renewal for the area. The regeneration offered an occasion to tackle 'Ballymun's difficult history, its vibrant community spirit and [provided] the opportunities to rewrite that history' (Murrayin McCrann, 2008, p. ix). According to David Prichard, '[w]hile area, like population, provides a simple measure of scale, to comprehend the extent of Ballymun's deprivations requires a grasp of complex social factors that are

difficult to measure' (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p. 2). The task of renewing Ballymun's image was a central topic of discussion around the regeneration, and one on which the local people looked to Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL) for suggestions. Prichard recounts a discussion on the topic in the early days of planning the regeneration: 'One panellist asked me if changing the name was necessary if its notoriety was to be expunged. My response was that UK politicians had tried that with Windscale, and did renaming it Sellafield make Ireland feel any better?' (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p. 3). It was decided that Ballymun would retain the name as a point of local pride. The problem was the view the rest of Ireland had looking in on Ballymun and the reputation it has gained since its establishment, as 'Ballymun residents were proud of the name – it was the rest of the country that needed to change its opinion' (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p. 3). The issue of generating a marketable image for Ballymun was seen as important to the overall project. 'That said, what is now called 'branding' is significant, and for Ballymun the rebranding started […] early' (Prichard, 2008, p. 3). The branding, or re-branding of Ballymun was an integral part of the regeneration as so much of the Masterplan focused on attracting outside private investors.

Changes in public planning philosophy in Ballymun coincided with the emergence of the Celtic Tiger Economy across Ireland. Described by Ciaran Murray as 'one of the largest public housing estates in Europe (and) Ireland's only really unique city neighbourhood' (Murray, 2008, p. ix), Ballymun was presented as a prime location for investment with a pliable community that sought a plan for social improvement. It is important to emphasise the point that the Ballymun community was at a particularly low ebb when the Masterplan was proposed so the malleability of the community and the intense hope for a better future was key to getting local people on board as 'social partners'. In his *The Celtic Tiger?: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland* (2000) Kieran Allen contends that the concept of social partnership was a key feature in the development and promotion of the Celtic Tiger. The level of involvement from local people in Ballymun in the regeneration of the area has been a distinctive feature of the process as a whole. However, key issues that were to be addressed through the regeneration, such as employment, are yet to be resolved, despite the cessation of regeneration work in the area. As it stands, in 2019, one of the key components of the 1998 Masterplan had yet to materialise: there is still no new shopping centre in Ballymun. Worse still, the shopping centre that was functioning prior to the beginning of the project, albeit inadequate to the town,

was dismantled during the regeneration. This has left the community with dramatically fewer commercial amenities than before the regeneration started. Only in early 2019 has development of a much needed Lidl begun on the site originally proposed to be a new shopping centre. In this, and many other ways, Ballymun's experience runs counter to the public promise of social partnership in Ireland, where:

> social partnership arrangements are supposed to provide a 'positive sum' game where all classes make gains from corporatist bargaining. As Ireland is an example of a 'strong corporatist' society, where the range of issues discussed and the degree of consultation with interest groups is quite high, one could expect significant gains to accrue to workers during an unprecedented boom.
>
> (Allen, 1999, p. 42)

It is precisely this veneer of social partnership during the Ballymun regeneration which establishes its credentials as a significant example of the strong, corporate, neoliberal agenda in Ireland. As Doreen Massey noted in her text *World City* (2007) the use of public funding in promoting an apparent socially democratic ideology that in fact reinforces the free market as a collective common sense is a major feature of the neoliberal agenda. Examples of this are seen in Britain and the US, and in strategies and tactics adopted by many other Western countries, including Ireland, which used tax revenue,

> to fund its social-democratic programme through a public sector itself culturally remoulded to reflect the ideological tenets of the market. Thus was the economic settlement embedded in society more widely as an unquestioned common sense.
>
> (Massey, 2007, p. xi).

The current situation in Ballymun testifies to a lack of meaningful social partnership as regeneration placed local people at the mercy of global markets. This was also presented as a common-sense notion during the Masterplan stage, supporting Massey's contention. While the regeneration promoted a philosophy of social consciousness, BRL was in fact established as a private company controlled by Dublin Corporation, in accordance with the *Urban Renewal Act 1998* which stated that: 'Each local authority may appoint a company (including a company established by a local authority) to be an authorised company for the

purposes of this Act' (1998, p.5). Such companies were to adhere to market conditions during any development of an area, in line with Massey's critique of a public sector under the ideological control of the market. The development of any area under this Act was to be primarily concerned with the conditions of the market and the type of development was to be aligned with 'the market conditions in the area or areas concerned as respects the supply of, and current and anticipated demand for, the relevant types of development' (*Urban Renewal Act 1998*, Part II, Section 8, Subsection 2(c), p.7). While the retail aspect of regeneration was key to the social development of the area – generating employment, and, therefore, better standards of living – no such development was proposed for residents of Ballymun. Prichard noted that BRL 'anticipated that retail renewal for Ballymun was going to be slow and incremental until new employment and new residents with greater spending power moved in, thus providing an incentive for retailers to invest' (McCrann, 2008, p.15). This, coupled with restrictions on housing benefits to people residing in privately owned accommodation in Ballymun indicates that parts of the BRL project were more aligned with gentrification than regeneration.

Despite being primarily deemed a social project, the regeneration of Ballymun was more significantly influenced by the fluctuation of tax incentives to promote private investment than it was by a social agenda. The ultimate control of BRL by Dublin City Council enabled this approach to influence practice,

> The exceptional development opportunity in Main Street results from land ownership being almost entirely with Dublin City Council, which is also the planning authority. BRL won special tax incentives in 1998 that have helped to deliver private investment in Main Street's Hotels and retail outlets.
>
> (Prichard, in McCrann, 2008, p. 14).

The deadlines associated with tax incentives put significant pressure on the development of the Masterplan overall and shortened the time frame for consultation on the final plan. Prichard notes that these incentives were prioritised despite the logic of the overall housing development programme, 'the plans had to be based on extensive resident consultation, have broad stakeholder support, and be published by 31st March 1998 or the project would miss the deadline for significant tax-designation benefits' (Prichard, 2008, p. 3).

In 'Mixing the Market: The Role of the Private Sector in Urban Regeneration in Ireland' (2009), Mary Lee Rhodes concludes that the mixture of private and public interest in urban regeneration in Ireland operated under the guise of speeding up the delivery process, while actually serving the interests of private landlords and investors, in the main. Rhodes's conclusion is aligned with Allen's finding that the rhetoric of social partnership in Ireland concealed a reality of uneven distribution of so called 'gains' from urban regeneration, as follows:

> social partnership arrangements - they are quite simply not designed to produce gains for 'both sides'. Instead they have become a means by which the corporate elite have won considerable freedom to raise productivity, restrain wages and pursue an agenda that transfers resources to them. This can be illustrated by looking at the issues of pay and productivity, taxation and public spending.
>
> (Allen, 1999, p.42)

Urban regeneration outcomes in Ireland in the 1990s suggest that these projects did indeed generate uneven gains and this has exacerbated social division in Dublin and indeed Ireland. Rhodes further emphasises this;

> While there have been clear economic benefits from urban regeneration (UR) in the major cities of Dublin and Belfast, problems of unequal distribution of benefits, unsustainable development, and marginalisation and segregation of vulnerable communities remain. […] UR has disproportionately benefited middle- and upper-class owner occupiers and private renters in Dublin.
>
> (Rhodes, 2009, p.178)

This is starkly evident in the Ballymun Regeneration, in which, while the proposed masterplan portrayed a preoccupation with social initiatives, actual outcomes offer a differing view of the overall nature and impact of social regeneration. In the initial planning stages, the project team proposed that their main aims could be explained as the 'four Es: education, employment, environment and empowerment (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p. 2). Power (1999) notes that unemployment in Ballymun prior to the regeneration was disproportionately higher than the rest of the country. There have no doubt been some beneficial projects during the regeneration – the axis stands as the perfect

example of this – but there has still been a large shortfall in the anticipated benefits of regeneration. A 2007 report on the regeneration of Ballymun carried out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoE) found that after a decade of regeneration the aims to improve the four Es had not been met. It stated that 'unemployment in Ballymun still remains between three and four times higher than the national average' (2007 Report, p.36). The report concluded that 'education standards are low in Ballymun. A survey in 2004 found that only 26% of pupils in Ballymun passed the Leaving Certificate compared with 74% nationally' (2007 Report, p.10). With the withdrawal of BRL and of other dedicated funding for projects in Ballymun, such as B.I.T.E. (Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education), problems with education run the risk of increasing once again,

> International experience has shown that it is important to sustain necessary supports well beyond completion of the physical works. Otherwise there is a distinct danger that the downward spiral of degeneration can re-emerge with all the investment put at risk'
>
> (Murray in McCrann, 2008, p. x).

The 2007 report on the Ballymun Regeneration also criticised a reliance on market forces and proposed an approach more focused on community-based initiatives: 'In addition to physical renewal, most regeneration programmes like that in Ballymun include further renewal initiatives focused on the communities' (Section 1, Subsection 1.4, p.15). Despite this, David Prichard gave an account, in 2008, of improved retail in the area and emphasised a reliance on private investment coming from outside Ballymun to improve employment for locals on the Ballymun estate:

> We anticipated that retails renewal for Ballymun was going to be slow and incremental until new employment and new residents with greater spending power moved in, thus providing an incentive for retailers to invest. We believed retail in that context to be a follower, not a leader. Retail would also provide much-needed new work opportunities for residents.
>
> (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p. 15)

This demonstrates the application in Ireland of a neoliberal agenda, as outlined by Massey, through the Ballymun regeneration. The focus was on finance and

investment as opposed to building productive communities, as '[f]inance proclaimed itself the golden goose, but its preference was to invest in assets rather than productive activities' (Massey, 2007, p. xi). This has become starkly evident in where Ballymun is now in 2019 with still only very little sign of commercial development, the dismantling of the town centre and several houses boarded up due to problems with corners being cut in the initial build.

The Critical 'I'

> "'Who' and 'what' you are is a function of 'where' you are."
>
> (Benson, 2001, p. ix)

The Ballymun Regeneration offers a unique example of how space is conceptualised and produced to serve the needs of a dominant neoliberal ideology prevalent in contemporary Western society. It is an example of geographies of neoliberalism. This has profound psychological as well as economic implications. Benson (2001) explores points of congruence between individuals and culture, both of which he recognises as primarily locative. He emphasises the influence of place on individual psychology and the reciprocal relationship between individual and culture in developing a form of cultural psychology, capable of thinking 'about how being placed in the world lies at the heart of being a self' (Benson, 2001, p. xi). The need to locate oneself in a place is a primordial instinct, intrinsic to existence, because 'for the sake of survival even the simplest creatures must be able to register 'where-they-are' (Benson, 2001, p. 4). This thesis uses the term dominant ideology as articulated by Terry Eagleton (1991), because it helps to explain, for example, how an illusion of social partnership was used to frame the urban renewal in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger economic boom. Eagleton explains the term:

> Dominant ideologies help to unify a social formation in ways convenient for its rulers; that it is not simply a matter of imposing ideas from above but of securing the complicity of subordinated classes and groups, and so on.
>
> (Eagleton, 1991, p.30).

As already stated, though social partnership was foregrounded as a key feature of the Ballymun Regeneration, the project's main drivers – and practical influences on decisions about development and infrastructure – were tax incentives for private investment. Eagleton points out that 'ideology […] retains

an emphasis on false or deceptive beliefs but regards such beliefs as arising not from the interests of a dominant class but from the material structure of society as a whole' (1999, p.30). The emphasis of arising from material structure rather than dominant class interests presents neoliberal ideology as seeming common sense. This chapter, and ultimately this thesis, is concerned with how the conception and development of Ballymun affected the cultural identity of the local people of the estate. How does this dominant ideology manifest itself in the individual and in turn the collective? In order to address this quandary, Benson offers a telling insight into the construction of personhood and identity based on being located in a place:

> Place is what human beings make of space and time, and it is that making which is of present interest. It is the subjectification of space and time, but a subjectification that has its roots in collective cultural achievements.
>
> (Benson, 2001, p. 7)

Benson emphasised that there is a reliance on both individual and collective achievements in locating personal identity. This highlights the importance of immediate community in construction of personal identity. How human beings convert space and time into place is of particular interest in reflecting both on the original estate of Ballymun and the recent regeneration. This is because the regeneration provides unique insight into how space and time can be manipulated to commodify space under the guise of social interests. The projection of Ballymun as a brand to be marketed (*Masterplan*, 1998) under the guise of social interest for the local community echoes this philosophy. How this is then absorbed as a common sense, as outlined by Massey, is that space and time is presented in a narrative form as having only one possible trajectory. It is presented as explicit and inevitable. To express only one possible trajectory the subject other is presented as in need of development in order to come further along the trajectory. However, as Massey suggests,

> it is perhaps less often made explicit that one of the crucial manoeuvres at work within it, to convince us of the ineluctability of this globalisation, is sleight of hand in terms of the conceptualisation of space and time. […] The proposition turns geography into history, space into time. And this again has a social and political effects. […] We are not to imagine them as having their own trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own, perhaps different futures.

(Massey, 2005, p.5)

In terms of the regeneration, the people of Ballymun fulfil the roles assigned to 'them' in Massey's analysis. It was they who were not able to discharge their 'responsibility' to provide their own housing in the sense outlined by the DoE (1991) and this meant they were behind in their incorporation into the singular narrative of Celtic Tiger progress. The private interests shaping Ballymun's future were presented as heroes of a 'progress' visible generally on a grand scale around the country and which had finally arrived to enable Ballymun to move along the neoliberal trajectory of advancement promoted by the Celtic Tiger. '[I]mplicit assumptions we make about space are important […] the way we imagine space has effects' (Massey, 2005, p.1), so how the space of the Ballymun estate was conceptualised was central to altering established, reciprocal, space/individual relationships. Despite acknowledged needs for public participation in planning regeneration, the powerful idea that the people of Ballymun occupied a space outside of normalcy produced a notion that their 'development' was a matter of re-shaping them so as to be 'like the rest of North Dublin' (Prichard in McCrann, 2008, p.3). In 2017 a documentary called *The 4th Act* further revealed the assumptions made about Ballymun as a space that required domination. Directed by Turlough Kelly and produced by Andrew Keogh, the documentary highlights that the essence of the regeneration was to bring the people of Ballymun 'in line with ruling class thinking' (Kelly in Murray, 2018). The way the space of Ballymun was perceived had direct implication for the place-based assumptions underpinning the collective identity of the people of Ballymun. How space was constructed had literal and figurative effects on the ghettoization of the town and the local people.

One notable occurrence that contributed to the early stages of consciously cognitively mapping my hometown was during a chance encounter in the axis. It was during a run of Dermot Bolger's Walking the Road (2007)*, in which I played the role of The Companion. This was the second play of Bolger's I had starred in, and during both plays I found myself in conversations with artists and professionals, and I often felt intimidated and out of my depth. During one such occasion I was silently part of a group conversation which included a filmmaker who wasn't from Ballymun. He passionately recounted his idea for a new film he wanted to call* The Wall*. Initially I thought the setting of this film would be in Northern Ireland, I knew walls were common there. I had experienced this since my mother had met her husband when I was nine. He was*

from East Belfast, and protestant and I had been warned by my mother to stay quiet when out in public for fear it would become obvious we were from south of the border. We had, on one occasion, visited her friends who lived in the Strand and I remembered vividly the barbed wire gates we had to pass through to enter the estate. It was a Catholic estate surrounded by Protestant estates and it was surrounded by huge walls for safety. The walls I saw there were dramatic enough to feature in a film, I thought. Or maybe the wall he spoke of was somewhere exotic, like Berlin. I was surprised when he said the setting was Ballymun. As he spoke of Ballymun being walled in I felt an uneasy enlightenment wash over me. As he described the landscape of Ballymun (at this time the flats were in the early stages of being demolished) I pictured myself walking the paths of the places he mentioned. How had I never noticed it before? Ballymun was literally walled in from the surrounding areas. Sillogue to the south west of Ballymun stopped at a huge wall which separated Sillogue's eight storey blocks from the neighbouring private houses of Glasnevin. As a teenager we dared to venture through the park beyond Poppintree into what we called 'Poshland' on the other side of the wall, the private houses of the Willows estate. To the east of Ballymun both the Shangan and Coultry flats ended at the wall that signalled the boundary between public and private housing. I had been completely blind to this physical structure. I felt a sudden sense of claustrophobia.

Chris Morash and Shaun Richards articulate the relationship between the production of space on stage and the production of social spaces in their influential text *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (2013). They contend that one reflects the other in cyclical relationship, it is 'a complex web of relations that flow both ways between stage space and social spaces' (p.4). They use a wide range of theoretical perspectives to develop 'a model for understanding the physical and cultural spaces occupied by theatre in a society, enabling an analysis of the ways in which the theatre is not simply shaped by existing spatial formations, but itself produces space' (Morash and Richards, 2013, p.4). This is particularly true of the theatre produced by Dermot Bolger. It can be argued, that his work with the axis Arts and Community Resource Centre, established it as a space that could galvanise the kind of critical thinking outlined in Gerry Smyth's Homework methodology. In Morash and Richards's terms, the creation and reception of Dermot Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy* shows both the effect of social space formation and cultural ideology on theatre, and in turn the efficacy of theatre in generating a social space of its own.

In the *Ballymun Incantation*, his first commission from the axis, Dermot Bolger prompts local audiences to invoke their collective strength to find and assert their own voice amid the chaos of the impending regeneration. He does so by conjuring and combining images of the flats complexes, echoes of the past, and hopes for the future,

Whose voice can you hear?
Who calling down the stair?
What ghost trapped in a lift shaft?
What child who played and laughed?

(Bolger, 2010, p.xviii)

In 'A Responsibility to Dream: Decolonising Independent Ireland', Victor Merriman contends that 'the decision to commission an artist to mark the obliteration of a stigmatised place produces results that elude the limitations and silences of corporate communication' (Merriman, 2005, p.495). He argues that the *Ballymun Incantation* 'humanised' (2005, p.495) the tumultuous and stigmatised past of the people of Ballymun. Bolger's verse, unfortunately, still resonates now with the incomplete physical regeneration as the incanted voices asked; 'Where are the shops we were promised?' (Bolger, 2010, p.xviii). The title of Merriman's article, 'A Responsibility to Dream' aptly describes exactly what seems to be the motivation of the work of Bolger and the axis. Their creative partnership provided a space for Ballymunners to dream up alternative futures amid the destruction of their way of life.

The principles of casting – professional and local performers, with an intergenerational mixture – used in the public reading of Bolger's *Incantation*, which was performed in 2004 and published in 2010, were applied to the staging of the plays of *The Ballymun Trilogy* (2004-2008). I was cast as Eileen, a leading role in the second play, *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006). In Act 1 Eileen, a young girl, is forced to emigrate because of an 'illegitimate' pregnancy, and in Act 2 I played Anna, a Moldovan immigrant negotiating her new home in Ballymun. Morash and Richards suggest that 'to strengthen further the emotional bond between action and audience, [Bolger] used local amateurs alongside professional actors' (2013, p.159). However, their view is that the themes of Bolger's plays were not radical. They contend that 'while they are far from radical in theme, they can be seen to be radical in their relationship with the audience members and their location' (Morash and Richards, 2013, p.159). I

would argue that in this case radical is a relative concept and that in some ways Bolger's themes were overtly radical when placed in the context of the regeneration. Although not overtly radical in theme from a perspective of a study of theatre, I suggest that the themes were radical for me and other local actors who were part of the process. Bolger's writing was one of the first times I had encountered a positive portrayal of my hometown. Moreover, it was the first time I had encountered a poetic exploration of what I encountered as everyday struggles. Rather than generating a narrative that was in line with the regeneration that deemed people from Ballymun as outside normalcy, Bolger's verse validated our lives. It gave us a literal stage space; a podium, but did not present us as a stereotype. This was a validation that galvanised a radical response in me and an urge to challenge the dominant social narrative. Morash and Richards note that this empowerment is key to Bolger's intentions in the *Ballymun Trilogy* (2013, p.160). In her thesis *Theatre in Urban Regeneration: Global Cities, New Narratives and the Regeneration of Ballymun (1998-2010)* Niamh Malone states that 'while there are a number of templates available to evaluate arts participation projects in urban areas undergoing regeneration, there is no universally accepted template for measuring the social impact of the arts' (2011, p.37). One of the purposes of this thesis is to offer a specific testimony to the social impact of the arts movement in Ballymun, something tangible and measurable that elucidates the effects the arts can have in empowering a voice to construct a critical response.

While my experience of working on Bolger's plays did indeed 'strengthen further the emotional bond between action and audience' as Morash and Richards suggests, I can state that the social consciousness it generated galvanised this thesis, which is intended to be challenging social action. The thesis aims to dissent from the policies that generated consequences the people of Ballymun still endure. Fictional writer Elif Shafak, in her 2010 TEDGlobal talk 'The Politics of Fiction' expresses that 'if you want to destroy something in this life, be it an acne, a blemish or the human soul, all you need to do is surround it with thick walls, it will dry up inside' (Shafak, TEDGlobal, 2010). Being part of the arts movement in Ballymun, working in the axis on Bolger's work generated a consciousness that allowed me to see the thick walls that literally and figuratively surround Ballymun. These walls ghettoise Ballymun and forge identities sometimes seen as outside normalcy. Shafak notes that 'one way of transcending these cultural ghettos is through the art of storytelling. Stories cannot demolish frontiers, but they can punch holes in our mental walls

and through these holes we can get a glimpse of the other, and sometimes, even like what we see' (Shafak, TEDGlobal, 2010). Morash and Richards document that Bolger aimed to empower the local people of Ballymun to 'take possession of their own destinies, to fight to reshape that place' (2013, p.160). Bolger's plays and axis casting did indeed empower me to permeate the physical and cultural ghetto I grew up in. It has informed my original critical analysis, the critical eye/I, of the stories that are told about stigmatised communities and the stories that reinforce the figurative wall of a cultural ghetto and those that transcend it. This thesis is a result of this.

Chapter 3

Theatre of Wasters: The Emergence of the "Northside Theatre

> To poison a nation, poison its stories. A demoralised nation tells demoralised stories to itself. Beware of the story-tellers who are not fully conscious of the importance of their gifts, and who are irresponsible in the application of their art: they could unwittingly help along the psychic destruction of their people.
>
> We are part human, part stories.
>
> (Ben Okri, 1995, p.17, 24)

This chapter explores the work of Passion Machine and the plays of Paul Mercier are critically analysed and placed within a theoretical and philosophical framework. Established in 1984, Passion Machine began in St Francis Xavier Hall in the local community of the Northside of the inner city of Dublin. Founded by playwright Paul Mercier and managing director John Sutton, the plays from Passion Machine attracted young, enthusiastic audiences. Following success with local audiences Passion Machine then moved Southside into the more city centre based theatres, most notably the Project Arts Centre. The plays discussed in this chapter are all unpublished and have not previously been a focus of academic discussion. I have been granted exclusive access to these scripts and has also conducted an exclusive interview with the main subject, playwright Paul Mercier. This chapter discusses the conception of Passion Machine as a theatre for the masses aiming to engage with a 'non-theatre going audience' (Mercier, 2014, Appendix) by exploring subject matter they felt was previously under explored in Irish theatre; issues and problems of the working

class in Dublin. This coupled with their location on the north side of the city generated a title for Passion Machine as 'Northside Theatre Company', a title they did not refute but did not wish to endorse as the defining feature of their image. Drawing on E. P. Thompson's influential text *The Making of the English Working Class* (1980) notions of class as a fluid term will be explored and adapted in accordance to the work of Michael Pierse, specifically his book *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey* (2001). This is applied to the construction of Mercier's work, critically analysing the play texts that were directed at this working and lower-class demographic in the earlier development of Passion Machine and an analysis of the particulars of this popular working-class representation of Northside Dubliners is explored. This is done using a framework generated from a reading of Irish theatre scholar Christopher Murray on the homogenisation of the poor. Furthermore, performance scholar Jen Harvie's (2009) approach of using the methodology of cultural materialism, which is attributed to Raymond Williams and Marvin Carlson, is employed to problematize ownership of the narratives of working class Northside Dubliners. Harvie ponders how 'proliferating forms of socially turned art contribute to neoliberal governmentality? […] Might they exacerbate inequalities more than they diminish them, for example by effectively limiting how much agency they actually divest to their audiences? (2013, p. 3). The exploration of the narratives of Mercier's earlier plays will utilise Brecht's writing on structure and form in realism to interrogate how much agency could be divested to the Northside audiences the Passion Machine presented their plays to.

Mercier's work is contextualised within the economic framework in which it was written, that is from 1984 to the mid-nineties. While the Celtic Tiger was a growing cub during the time in which Passion Machine emerged, this chapter outlines the thematic representation seen in Mercier's early plays of subject

matter that attwmpted to reflect the struggling demographic of Dublin's Northside lower and working classes. Mercier's early work was created in an Ireland suffering economic hardship and high levels of unemployment in the mid to late 80s and continued as the Celtic Tiger grew from an eager cub into a fully-fledged 'economic miracle' (Sweeney, 1999). As noted by feminist scholar bell hooks; 'it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class. It's the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, and uncertain about where we stand' (2000, p.vii). Critique of Irish society has characterised it as a 'classless society' (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007, p.170), however, Mercier's early plays addressed explorations of class systems in Ireland and the plight of an underclass. How these class systems were represented on the Passion Machine stage as a fledgling theatre company on the Northside are investigated and critiqued. To do so, the work of renowned British playwright and theatre theorist John McGrath and his influential critique on theatre for the working class is used in the context of the plays by Mercier. In this chapter Mercier's earlier plays *Drowning* (1984), *Wasters* (1985), *Spacers* (1986) and *Studs* (1986) take central focus. These plays established Passion Machine in the SFX and provided the nickname of 'Northside Theatre' for the company before the later moved to Project Arts Centre on the Southside of the city. Mercier's early plays are examined as a cornerstone of the popular perception of a 'renaissance' in Dublin theatre as discussed by Dublin writer Ferdia MacAnna in his influential article 'The Dublin Renaissance: An Essay on Modern Dublin and Dublin Writers' for *The Irish Review* in 1991.

> Strangers, gods and monsters represent experiences of extremity which bring us to the edge. They subvert our established categories and challenge us to think again. And because they threaten the known with the unknown, they are often set apart in fear and trembling. Exiled to hell

> or heaven; or simply ostracized from the human community into a land of aliens.
>
> (Kearney, 2003, p.1)

Paul Mercier has not attracted as much attention academically as the other subjects of this study, yet it is his work that acts as a major precursor to the work of Roddy Doyle and is an acknowledged source of Doyle's inspiration. Mercier is briefly mentioned by Kirsti Tarien Powell in relation to 'Northside Realism' yet his work has never been the focus of critical study. The lack of focused critical analysis is surprising considering the popularity of the Passion Machine and especially the plays of Mercier during the mid-80s to mid-90s. A speculative reasoning for this might be that since Mercier's plays are unpublished they are not as easily accessible as those of Doyle and Bolger. Despite the absence of studies focused on Mercier's work, an article published by Ferdia MacAnna in 1991 captures a snapshot of the Dublin theatre scene of the late 80s and early 90s in Dublin. The article titled; 'An Essay on Modern Dublin and Dublin Writers: The Dublin Renaissance', is a provocative piece of writing which offers an insight into the varied and complex reception received by the work of Passion Machine and the plays of Paul Mercier:

> Their primary purpose is to entertain, a task they rarely fail to accomplish even at the risk of alienating critics, social workers and literary and academic pedants who would like to see all theatre infused with massive dollops of consciousness-raising social moralising. Anyone looking for a tidy moral message should stay at home and watch 'Little House on the Prairie'.
>
> (MacAnna, 1991, p.25)

The language used by MacAnna defies critics to take Mercier's and the work of the Passion Machine as a subject for critical analysis at the expense of the entertaining nature of the work. However, MacAnna also notes that; 'Mercier's plays […] brought to the stage many aspects of life in an area of Dublin which had been virtually ignored by Irish Media and mainstream theatre' (MacAnna,1991, p.24). It is precisely this point which generated a furore around the work of Passion Machine. The plays of Mercier and the Passion Machine depicted young, unemployed and criminal youth from the Northside of Dublin. Terminology such as 'wasters' and 'spacers', which serve as titles for Mercier's plays, are common descriptors used in the representation of Northsiders. This led some to the conclusion that the plays of Passion Machine were operating with stereotypes of the marginalised Northside. As MacAnna points out, dissent from the praise received by Passion Machine pointed to the use of stereotype and manipulation of contemporary issues: 'Some critics have criticised the Passion Machine's later plays as being 'shallow and exploitative' or for failing to fully explore the social issues' (MacAnna, 1991, p.25). However, the overarching commentary on the work of Passion Machine was that they were innovative and timely. As English and Economics scholar Ulrike Paschal contends: 'Roddy Doyle, Ferdia MacAnna and Paul Mercier, work exactly with these stereotypes, even amplifying them, which make their novels and plays a lot more fun to read and watch, without them being any less concerned with the problems plaguing the city' (Paschal, 1998, p.39). The work of Mercier and the Passion Machine used the stories they perceived from the margins of society and used the stage to recant their tales. It is precisely how narratives of the marginalised communities of Dublin in the 80s were generated which is explored in this chapter and this provides the rationale for choosing Mercier's early plays for analysis.

<u>The narrative of the 'other'</u>

> Stories do not belong to eternity. They belong to time. And out of time they grow. And it is through lives that we touch the bedrock of suffering and the fire of the soul.
>
> (Okri, 1997, p.23-24)

Paul Mercier was originally an Irish teacher in Greendale Community School in Kilbarrack before he co-founded the theatre company, Passion Machine, with managing director John Sutton, in 1984. Mercier is noted as the 'co-founder and driving force behind Passion Machine' (Murray, 1997, p.241). The majority of plays in Passion Machines repertoire were written by Mercier himself, making Mercier's plays an integral part of the development of Passion Machine as a theatre company. It was specifically his work as a teacher that inspired his early move into writing plays as he felt it provided a platform to express the helplessness he perceived in his young students and the lack of cultural empowerment. This is seen strongly in Mercier's earlier work, which is focused on the hyper local, Northside Dublin youth and the perils of being from a disenfranchised generation of Dublin in the 80s. As noted by Christopher Murray in his book *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to a Nation* (1997), it is sometimes presumed that the work of Mercier was not necessarily a specific commentary on the society in which the plays were set. According to Murray, the plays 'reflect working class life in much the same way as Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1998), with great energy but without social commentary' (1997, p.241). This is one of the biggest points of contention in the brief criticism of the plays of Mercier and Passion Machine, if the work is or isn't social commentary. However, Mercier himself clarifies this and explains that his theatre was a way of attempting to reflect the world he saw around him. In an interview for this research project Mercier states that:

> We didn't feel that theatre was expressing, or giving voice to, or showing the world as we saw it, essentially. Our generation, our work, where I was working and the people I was coming into contact with, there was just no sense that in any way this world was being reflected at all. So, I wanted to write about that, and in a way put that experience on the stage, we also felt that the way to do this was to do it ourselves, independently.
>
> (Mercier, 2014, Appendix)

The conception of Passion Machine was based on utilising the stage as a podium of sorts to represent what was perceived as the underrepresented communities on the Irish Stage. Mercier intended to reflect the everyday lives of regular working-class people that he saw in Dublin and the experiences he perceived in pockets all over the city. He wanted to tell untold stories.

It is widely documented that Passion Machine dealt with the issues and problems they perceived as a blight on contemporary culture in Dublin of the 80s. As MacAnna points out: 'The Passion Machine established itself at the SFX in Sherrard Street with a series of roustabout, high-energy entertainments which deal with working-class life on Dublin's northside' (1991, p.24). While the working class had been a prominent feature in the history of Irish plays, by Sean O'Casey, James McKenna and Heno Magee, to name a few, it was the contemporary situation of 80s and 90s Dublin that occupied the narrative of Passion Machine. It was precisely the stories imagined from the everyday life of the working classes in Dublin that populated the plays of Paul Mercier. The term 'working class' poses a quandary in this instance. Drawing on the seminal work of E. P. Thompson regarding class: '"Working classes" is a descriptive term, which evades as much as it defines […] the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and

anatomize its structure' (Thompson, 1991, Loc, 176, 182). It is specifically this slippery nature of class which makes defining it quite difficult and allows for universalities and generalisations of people to take place. This ambiguity of the term serves the neo liberal framework the Irish state had bought in to during modernization under Taoiseach Sean Lemass, this point is discussed in more depth in later chapters of this thesis. It also promotes a homogenization of the working class and the poor in general. Charles Murray in his 2015 book *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, describes how this homogenization can take place. Murray begins with a proposition that he sees as the point of division between cultures of rich and poor:

> [P]oor and not poor alike, use the same general calculus in arriving at decisions; only the exigencies are different. Poor people play with fewer chips and cannot wait as long for the results. Therefore, they tend to reach decisions that a more affluent person would not reach.
>
> (Murray, 2015, p.155)

While trying to determine between rich and poor and define motivations within each categories Murray himself generates what can be seen as a standardized set of mathematical rules for communities of people. This emphasizes the difficulty expressed by E. P. Thompson regarding the fluidity of class terminology. However, Murray does offer us a template for the rational of the working class within the wider economic framework. He notes: 'behaviours that are "rational" are different at different economic levels' (Murray, 2015, p.155). The psychological effects of operating at the lower levels of the economic framework are more intensely explored in Chapter 5. It is precisely by applying the theories of Murray to the plays of Mercier that we can see the homogenisation of the working-class Dubliner. As Bertolt Brecht states, 'realism is not a pure question of form […] Reality changes; to represent it , the

means of representation must change too' (1964, p.202). The two plays of *Drowning* and *Wasters* differ greatly in form, one being a rock musical and the other tending more towards forth wall theatre. Yet both deal within the realm of realism when exploring the Northside working class as realism can be in 'factual or a fantastic form' (Brecht, 1964, p. 204). Brecht also states that 'in each individual case the picture given of life must be compared, not with another picture, but with the actual life portrayed' (1964, p. 205). Applying this logic to the plays of Mercier, actions like that of the character Joycer, who attempts to burgle a factory warehouse in the play *Wasters* can be rationalised when placed in economic context. The anger and frustration from the Da character in *Drowning* can be rationalised when in context of the desperation of unemployment. What is suggested here though is that Joycer burgles because he is a 'waster', and the wider economic ideology which creates the economic environment seems invisible. The Da character and his anger is presented as a personal flaw as he is a character that it is difficult to sympathise with.

However, firstly, we explore the complex task of generating narratives about people who are largely ignored in mainstream culture. Having the agency to tell a story is powerful. As psychologist Jerome Bruner, paraphrasing Henry James, notes: 'stories happen to people who know how to tell them' (2004, p.692). To push that a step further it could also be argued that stories can be told about people if other people choose to tell them. This is the case of the plays of Passion Machine. How these stories of the working and lower classes were told reveal the attitudes and perceptions of the social stratification of these classes and where they fit in wider society. These universalities and generalisations that homogenate classes reveal themselves within the stories of a culture. While MacAnna suggested against critical analysis of the narrative structure of Mercier's plays, these plays offer an insight into the perceived world of the working class in 1980s Dublin. They also highlight the burgeoning neoliberal

agenda that would prop up the Celtic Tiger and continue and even intensify through the current economic downturn and age of austerity. Through an analysis of the narrative structure in the plays we can uncover the homogenizing tendency towards the working class in Dublin.

One way in which we continually evaluate and reevaluate our circumstance is through stories. Classes are defined by stories. These stories and narratives alter our perceptions and influence how we navigate through our lived worlds. Community psychologist Christina Galavotti et al. explains that 'the way we make sense of everyday events depends on the stories we have heard, the scripts we have collected over a lifetime that we all keep in our heads. […] These stories give shape to our experiences as well as help us anticipate and act upon current situations' (2005, p.26). This emphasises the importance of stories in our everyday lives and become geographical. The stories linked to place that connote identity effects how we navigate that space. Our notion of class boundaries is sprung from the cultural stories that portray social boundaries and social stratification even when this is not the intention. Galavotti, paraphrasing Jerome Bruner notes that 'an endangered society is one whose members can no longer change the stories they tell themselves' (2005, p.26). It is appropriate therefore to break down how narrative is interpreted and how it is understood to interrogate the structure which lends itself to storytelling and promotes social configuration. Brecht echoes Bruner's sentiment when discussing realism in theatre as he contests that to have a social impact a 'work of art shows characters and events as historical and alterable, and as contradictory' (Brecht, 1964, p. 311). Every story provides an image of a place and time, whether it intends to or not and therefore there is a significance in critically analysing the narrative structure of Mercier's work.

First though we must explore how narrative is understood, provides, and is given meaning. As pointed out by Bruner:

> [Narrative] is a construction by human beings through active ratiocination, by the same kind of ratiocination though which we construct narratives. When somebody tells you his life […] it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something unequivocally given.
>
> (Bruner, 2004, p.692)

When someone narrates themselves, they do so through a cognitive mechanism of thought appropriation and while this may relay a personal truth it is not unequivocally so. Moving this one step further to someone telling you someone else's life, still follows the same cognitive methods and relays a narrative perceived from a distance. These are the parameters which must be acknowledged when using play texts as cultural commentary. This is better explained by Bruner using the ancient theories of Aristotle:

> Aristotle used the idea in the *Poetics* in order to describe the manner in which drama imitated "life", seeming to imply, thereby, that narrative, somehow, consisted of reporting things as they had happened, the order of narrative thus being determined by the order of events in life. But a close reading of the *Poetics* suggests that he had something else in mind. Mimesis was the capturing of "life in action", an elaboration and amelioration of what happened.
>
> (Bruner, 1990, p.45)

For the critical analysis of the plays of Paul Mercier this distinction is an important one. Mercier's act of writing the plays and the context in which they were created are just as important as the narrative structure of the plays themselves. Brecht suggests that the theatre has the ability to show 'the structure of society' (1964, p.189). While this statement seems simple the complexity and insidiousness of neoliberal ideology can generate a smoke and

mirrors illusion that presents oppression as empowerment when the 'other' has had little or no visible representation. Brecht asserts that 'a mirror surface reality cannot expose the structures or relations of power that make it function' (1964, p.107). Making the 'other' visible from prior invisibility can seem like a revolutionary act, however, how the other is represented when made visible can reify existing structures in society. The composition of the narratives of the working class in the plays of Mercier emphasise the working class as being 'other'.

Drowning in the margins

Written in 1984, *Drowning* was the first play produced by Passion Machine, a founding work for the theatre company which was performed in what was at the time the new venue of St. Francis of Xavier hall or the SFX theatre as it would become commonly known. The SFX was located on Upper Sherrard Street in the heart of the North Inner City. The local demographic was majority working class and the surrounding residents mainly used the SFX as a bingo hall. The play explores the despair of a family suffering the effects of the unemployment of the patriarch, the decline of the mental health of the matriarch of the family and the chaos that this causes for the whole family. *Drowning* takes the form of a contemporary rock musical, and in this construction bares resemblance to *The Scatterin'* by James McKenna discussed in the introduction. It follows Luke, the protagonist, and his dreams of becoming his alter ego Ossy Stench and leaving his roots behind him for the rock and roll celebrity lifestyle:

> Luke: 'And above it all I'd see a whole new me stitched on those clouds. And I'd would say to myself, take that great leap, unleash yourself on the world, change your name and shoot a revolution.
>
> (Mercier, 1984, p11, Unpublished)

The play moves between manifestations of this dream and Luke's harsh reality of a dysfunctional family that pulls him from those dream clouds back to the actuality of his unemployment and domestic disturbances. Luke's world of social deprivation and hardship are in stark contrast to the imaginary celebrity world he escapes to. Murray suggests that it is 'the changes that social policy made in the rewards and penalties, carrots and sticks, that govern human behaviour' (Murray, 2015 p.155). In this instance Luke has been living a penalty of a life of hardship resulting from his father's unemployment. He sees celebrity as his way out, it is the carrot on the end of the stick that he is chasing in his attempt to not only survive but also get ahead. However, Luke's social position deems the carrot an impossible dream and conveys the neoliberal culture of aspiration from the lower classes to leisure class. Luke embodies the tangled web of economic pressure on the poor and the lure of ambition as an illusionary means to escape deprivation. Charles Murray, discussing the role of finance in the neoliberal culture of society, points out: 'Status and money are the most influential rewards that society uses to manage behaviour. Indeed, for many people, the dominant motive for making money is to buy status' (2015, p.178). In Luke's case he craves this status as a solace from his reality. There is fluidity in the writing of the play that captures the essence of a daydreaming youth culture influenced by popular music and television and the seeming promise of a celebrity lifestyle for personal reinvention. This is a common feature that dominated Mercier's early plays. MacAnna observed that 'the Passion Machine were influenced more by local environment and modern pop culture – television, advertising, rock and pop music pup life etc. – than any theatrical precursor (1991, p.25). There is an indication to the direct influence of the pop culture of the time as Luke's mother proclaims 'I told him not to wear that bloody earring' (Mercier, 1984, p. 13) creating a possible veiled reference to the rising Irish rock band U2 and the lead singer Bono's signature attire. This is significant as Bono has now become principal example of the leisure class in

Ireland. Yet even within the mirage of his dream Luke seems unable to release himself completely from the hardships of impoverished upbringings and delicate familial relationships.

> LUKE: On my confirmation day, I wore a suit like this.
> They stared then too because everyone else didn't have to wear fuckin' hand-me-downs.
> CHUCK: We've heard this, we've...
> LUKE: Remember? I wore the biggest rosette in the whole church. Remember, ma? The old man was in a coma that morning. Couldn't face the holy spirit, he said, so he....
> BAND:...drank himself stupid.
> LUKE: (TO MA) But you, you wept when I sang cos I sang louder than all them other prats and you stood in the middle of that aisle in tears.
>
> (Mercier, 1984, p.18, Unpublished)

There is a torment felt by the protagonist resulting from a dichotomy between the strained relationships ensuing from the social and economic difficulties faced by him and his family and the love they have for one another. While the father seems belligerent, the despair experienced by unemployment is expressed as all consuming. Mercier play touches upon what Murray describes as 'the distinction between the behaviours that make sense when one is poor and the behaviours that make sense when one is not poor' (2015, p.156). Luke transforms to his alter ego Ossy Stench to escape the world around him, but his familial bond brings him back to reality. It is ultimately the love he has for his family that consistently forces Ossy Stench to return to being Luke and to face the world in which he lives.

The play dives head first into issues that were plaguing the Irish working class in the 1980s, a working class that were essentially not working. In 1988, Dublin Institute of Technology economist Anto T. Kerins noted in *Unemployment: A Need for Change* that:

> Unemployment is the most important problem facing Ireland today. Politicians and public servants, employers and employees, academics and ordinary citizens are becoming increasingly concerned at the large number of people without work.
>
> (1988, p.xii)

Drowning was four years ahead of this observation, reflecting the implications of this issue and the difficulties faced by the people living with the consequences; accurately holding up a mirror to the nation and its problems before politics and academics had the chance to catch up. However, with the emphasis in Mercier's play being more on the personal and less on the wider environment it is easy to fall into the trap of homogenising the poor as masters of their own fate. Richard Breen, who was senior researcher at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), emphasised that unemployment in Ireland, at the time, was much more than a singular matter and the trickledown effects of the issue were much more problematic than just the loss of employment:

> The meaning of work is broader than the mere earning of a wage. A large number of authors (for example, Hayes and Nullman 1981, pp. 38-43; Jahoda et al 1979, pp. 494-95) have identified several other functions served by work; these include the structuring of time, the affording of opportunities for social interaction, and the provision of a basis for one's social status, self-respect and personal identity. The absence of work, then, results in far more than a loss of income.

(Breen, 1988 p9.)

The dramatic world of *Drowning* anticipates shifts in the social and economic climate in the actual world of Northside Dublin. Each point has manifestations in at least one or more of the characters in the play and the broken structuring of time influenced not only the character of the protagonist but also the structure of the play itself in the form of the dreamlike movement of scenes. This is emphasising Christopher Murray's contention that plays can 'ritualise the dreams of order' (1997, p.241). In this sense the play ritualises the dreams of status as a means of escape from impoverished circumstances. The affluence is presented as order from the chaos of Luke's life suffering scarcity. Luke's ritual of dreaming he is elsewhere is a means of escape but also an attempt to make sense of the chaos of his life. The lack of Luke's 'opportunities for social interaction' can be perceived in his yearning to be surrounded by people as his alter ego Ossy Stench is. Luke embodies this craving for self-respect and social status described by Breen as this is lacking in his life of unemployment and uncertainty. He dreams of being surrounded by an adoring public and regularly converses with his fictional band member friends using these imaginary confidants to outwardly express the inner psychology of the complexity of chasing the carrot on the stick:

> RICK: Ye don't have the balls, do ye?
> LUKE: Get out of me head!
> RICK: All you do is sit around this kip makin' excuses for yourself!
> LUKE: How come you're only a drummer, Rick?
> RICK: Or maybe ye just don't have what it takes.
>
> (Mercier, 1984, p.20, Unpublished)

This captures the isolation documented as a dominant experience of unemployed people, especially young people whose high energy usually craves sociability. But problematically it also reveals a tendency to blame those in poverty for their own misfortune. The line 'All you do is sit around this kip makin' excuses for yourself!' imprisons Luke in legitimised class structure by suggesting his difficulties only result from his lack of action. Luke's sister, or 'Sis' as the character is referred to in the play, is the only one of the family who has a job. She works in the local supermarket, a point which has a mixed reception within the family:

> LUKE: We had time to dwell on these things.
> DA: In fact....
> LUKE: All day to ponder.
> DA: ...you can shove them bingo cards up your hole.
> LUKE: Cos no-one worked...
> SIS: I work
> LUKE: Except Sis who works part-time in the local warehouse.
> SIS: It's a supermarket.
> DA: Don't even take the stuff out of the boxes.
> SIS: It's efficient.
> JOEY: Don't even take them off the palettes
> MA: For convenience.
> DA: They couldn't give a bollix in that kip.
> MA: At least she's employed.
> DA: Wouldn't get that in my day.
> SIS: Well, I like it.
>
> (Mercier, 1988, p.9-10, Unpublished)

This scene sees the second use of status within social structuring, as a goad: 'the lures of status as a goad for ambition (Murray, 2015, p.178). In the case of the family in *Drowning* the sister's economic position is seen as her exerting a power or hold over them, as if she in fact goads them with her position of employment which stems from an insecurity from their own difficulties with self-respect and status described by Breen. There is a constant unease throughout the play regarding the sister's job as it is seen by the unemployed men of the house, especially the Da, as a direct challenge on their own status, placing the sister above them because she contributes to the upkeep of the house. There is a shifting of roles and a feeling that she is fulfilling a responsibility that should be filled by the man of the house.

> MA: At least she pays her way.
> DA: Does she now?
> MA: She brings money home.
> DA: You sayin' I don't earn money
> MA: No
> DA: Then what are ye saying?
> MA: You cost money.
>
> (Mercier, 1984, p.10, Unpublished)

This directly echoes the discussion on employment made by Richard Breen in Kerins' 1988 publication that the sister's provision for social status is much higher than the rest of her family causing anxious resentments within the unit. The anxiety of unemployment is the root of the family's frustration and is a driving force of the plot of the action. For this reason *Drowning* reflects the time in which it was written. It is this anxiety that seems to directly challenge the father's view of his own identity and self-respect resulting in the action that

causes the family unit to buckle and break under the manifestations of social and economic strain:

DA: Rhoda Deasy is a stuck-up...
MA: My sister will not be spoken of...
DA: That rip will keep her nose out of my business.
SIS: I'm sick of this house.
DA: (TO SIS) Then shag off with your money.
MA: If my father heard you.
DA: He's dead.
MA: He said you were nothing more than...
DA: Careful now...
MA: No better than a...
DA: Watch it...
MA: ...than a...
DA: I mean it...
MA: ...a common layabout!

DA STRIKES MA

(Mercier, 1984, p.26-27, Unpublished)

Once again the play echoes the Breen's research exploring the crisis of identity and self-respect that is suffered by the unemployed. In the case of the play this social pressure marked by the descent of the family unit to extremes of domestic violence with the older brother, Joey, defending his mother and subsequently crashing into the mother's bird cage full of her prized exotic pink budgies. The escape of the budgies can be seen as a metaphor for the inner desire felt, not only by the protagonist but the whole family, to escape the clutches of their economic situation:

> LUKE: And this protected species go apeshit all over the gaff, taking it out on the walls and ceiling as if they had always hated the kip.
> The birds gave her the two fingers and legged it forever.
>
> (Mercier, 1984,p28-29, Unpublished)

The violent imagery of the birds' escape drives homes the immense pressure unemployment places on not only the individual but also the people closest to them. This ripple effect of problems with unemployment was felt strongly in Ireland in the 80s, especially in urban areas with built up populations:

> Unemployed adults come under considerable pressure from neighbours, family and society at large to get a job, and this can lead to considerable stress, particularly when attempts to find work continually meet with no success. The process of looking for work itself often becomes humiliating, and this humiliation may be compounded by those who regard the unemployed as 'social welfare scroungers' or 'defrauders'.
>
> (Breen, 1988, p.9)

These issues are at the heart of *Drowning* which accurately captured a time in Irish history and put it on an unfamiliar stage, reflecting a world that was not being represented at the time. Yet instead of using a right-wing discourse of humiliation of the working class, Mercier delved into the complexities of the physical effects of rampant unemployment by utilising the device of the family unit, which is much revered in Irish culture. Fintan O'Toole believes 'the play [is] about the way people relate to each other and the world around them rather than about their inner psychology' (O'Toole, 2012, p.72). What is less felt is the sense of the wider systems of social structure that entangles the family and contributes to their class position. Mercier focuses on the individual and the

family unit but the focus never shifts to the wider cause of their unemployment. Mercier discusses what J.K. Galbraith described as a 'functional underclass' (1992, p.30), however, he focuses on the underclass and not how this class is functional in neoliberal society and that most unemployment is a cause of fluctuating markets forces. The carrot and the stick discussed by Charles Murray, the irony being that the carrot is designed to be attained. Mercier portrays the turmoil but falls short of portraying the cause of the turmoil. The plays leaves a longing to get, what Brecht describes as a, 'more exact representation of the real social forces operating under the immediately visible surface' (1964, p.205). The lack of this lends more to what Harvie suggest is a limiting of the agency of the Northside audiences engaged in Passion Machine's performances.

Mercier's play also has a resonance with today's current climate. After the 2008 crash, Ireland has been plummeted back into extreme austerity and popular and social media has once again focused its lens on the issue of unemployment, with specific right-wing discourse enhancing this fear of 'humiliation' felt by unemployed people and words such as 'scroungers' have been catapulted back to the forefront of popular public discourse. The lure of celebrity is becoming a more acceptable instrument of escape from the mundane every day. This can be seen in contemporary programmes such as the X-Factor where the contestants exclaim, they do not want to merely be a cleaner or a bin man or a shop assistant anymore. *Drowning* anticipates shows such as the X-Factor and in some ways foretold a dominant narrative of the contemporary condition. It is these elements which make Mercier's *Drowning* as relevant today and could arguably still have an impact on contemporary working-class audiences.

Passion Machine not only established itself as a theatre company that explored current issues onstage, they also encountered huge challenges when it

came to sustain and develop the capabilities of producing their own work. This was noted by Fintan O'Toole in his journalistic piece 'The Myth of Our Renaissance' in the *Sunday Tribune* on the 9th of November 1986. O'Toole writes: 'We have to remember, however, that this playwriting is taking place in spite of, and not because of, the institutions of the Irish theatre. Theatre has not, for a very long time, been so little in the way of a commitment to new writers by Irish theatres' (2012, p.268). Mercier is keen to note that working in spite of the institution Irish theatre was not a counterattack on the institutions that were not committed to new and emerging Irish writers but rather it was the drive to tell stories he perceived to be untold on the Irish stage that sustained Passion Machine (Mercier, 2014, Appendix). Andrew MacLaran documents that the acceleration of deindustrialisation between 1971 and 1981 caused an increase in Dublin's inner city at three times the rate of the national average (MacLaran, 1993). Jonathan Ilan notes that by the 1980s the extent of heroin addiction in the area was 'cataclysmic' (2011, p. 1145). Mercier and the Passion Machine targeted the people local to the SFX on the North inner city that were in this demographic. They adopted a direct strategy to bring together local people who had never experienced theatre with regular theatregoers. This is evidenced later in this chapter with quotes from Mercier during an interview for this thesis. He wanted the people on the venue's doorstep to attend productions. Despite the risks of unfamiliar subject matter and a target audience, that was not previously renowned for parting with their limited resources in exchange for theatre tickets, Passion Machine surged forward breaking significant ground in a short space of time, as once again noted by O'Toole in 1986:

> It is an astonishing fact, therefore, that the major centre of new Irish work has been an unsubsidized venue concentrating on the work of one writer. […] But had Mercier not been able to physically put the plays on the stage himself, an ability which hardly any other Irish playwright shares,

> there is a strong chance that the work would not have been presented for the audience which he wants to reach.
>
> (O'Toole, 2012, p.269)

The commitment to tell the stories of the marginalised communities Mercier witnessed in Dublin at the time contributed to the process of urban development of the city throughout the 80s. As Jen Harvie points out: 'Theatre actually does more than demonstrate urban process, therefore: theatre is a part of urban process, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself' (2009, p. 7). Mercier cognitively appropriated his perception of Dublin youth and presented it in accessible forms of theatre for the very people he wrote about. This process had previously been referred to as giving 'voice [to] the voiceless' (Pierse, 2013, p.54) as this process of representing the underrepresented bring them into focus in the cultural conversation and generate solidarity. Harvie contends that 'gathering at theatres committed to a particular constituency can reinforce a sense of that group identity, or deliberately behaving contrary to cultural norms can challenge those norms, as when cyclists in Critical Mass temporarily dislodge the car from its dominance of the road' (2009, p.9). However, utilising a framework of cultural analysis outlined in *Theatre and the City* (2009) Harvie demonstrates that there is still a perplexity of how progressive a work can be when interrogated within cultural materialism. To elaborate on this Harvie explains that 'those privileged few who deal in capital speculation – or finance capital – can end up making the most money, and those who actually labour to produce the goods can end up losing out' (2009, p. 19). In this vein there is a similarity between financial capital and cultural capital. In the theatre those without means are at the mercy to hear their stories produced by those who have means. This is the case of Passion Machine. Having said this, it is important, that while acknowledging these limitations, we also recognise the mobilising power of the theatre.

> Cultural materialist analysis risks suggesting that making socially progressive theatre verges on the impossible because theatre is always so constrained by its material conditions. Conversely, performative analysis can give the impression that theatre and performance are infinitely progressive, offering us unlimited opportunities to reinvent ourselves with unlimited agency.
>
> (Harvie, 2009, p. 9)

It is within the text of the scripts of Mercier that we can see an attempt to counteract limiting social conditions by offering a podium for expression of issues and generating a discussion. Although they refuted the 'voice for the voiceless' tag, Passion Machine catapulted working and lower-class issues into conversation and began a cultural dialogue.

As previously mentioned Passion Machine's second production *Wasters* was a roaring success. Described by Fintan O'Toole, in his review of the play, as 'one of the best productions of 1985' (2012, p.47), *Wasters* is set on a literal 'waste-ground that lies on the edge of Dublin' (Mercier, 1985, p.3, Unpublished). The fourth wall style of the play is based around six young people, on the cusp of adulthood, celebrating the homecoming of one of them from his emigrant home of the boroughs of London. However, this is not a supressed romantic homecoming as in the likes of Tom Murphy's popular *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985). 'The mood has changed. The plays that try to reflect Ireland now allow for no nostalgia. Ireland is not a place from which one is forced into exile; it is now seen through the eyes of the returned emigrant, seen in all its stasis and hopelessness' (O'Toole, 2012, p.44-45). In discussing the origins of the play during my interview Mercier states:

> [The] ultimate act in *Wasters* was, at the time, the idea [was] putting six wasters on the stage, that was the idea. That's all I was doing. I'm going to put six wasters on the stage and I'm going to make heroes out of them because, society just thinks they are good for nothings.
>
> (Mercier, 2014, Appendix)

Wasters attempts to embody life in the margins both physically and metaphorically. The youth are literally 'on the edge of Dublin' and their lives are on the edge of transition from adolescence to adulthood, with the looming responsibilities that go hand in hand. Mercier moves one more step outward from the self; *Drowning* was located within the family unit and *Wasters* is located within the next important community in a person's life, their social circle. This particular social circle also operates within the margins, the margins of the perceived lower classes of Dublin. As O'Toole explains: 'The characters of *Wasters* are the disenfranchised of Irish society and of Irish literature' (2012, p.45). The term 'disenfranchised' operate also within the binary of neoliberalism. Unpacking the term reveals this. Disenfranchised as opposed to being franchised supports a superior and an inferior, legitimising class structure. Operating within this realm of marginality brings with it itself responsibilities. bell hooks stresses that 'these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance' (hooks, 1990, p.151). Establishing the setting of this play, in both a literal and metaphorical sense, as a site of futility begins from the very opening;

> DUCKY: If I'd known it was gonna be a scorcher I woulda gotten outa bed earlier.
> BONZO: Ye never know, do ye.
> DUCKY: If it's like this tomorra I'm gettin' up.
> (*Slight pause*)
> But then I won't know till I'm up, will I.

BONZO: Yeah but if them clouds are anythin' to go by.
DUCKY: What way are they goin'?
BONZO: Red.
DUCKY: What direction, ye sap?
BONZO: Never mind the direction. If they're red now it'll be blue skies tomorra.
DUCKY: Ah tha' never happens. Elsewhere yeah. Not here. Nothin' happens here.
BONZO: So I've noticed.

(Mercier, 1985, p.4, Unpublished)

From the beginning we are given the sense that this group of youth have very little to get out of the bed for in the morning. The hopelessness of disenfranchisement continues throughout without opposition. Following hooks contention that locating work within the margins either serves to further repress or offer a site of resistance, there is no evidence that these characters resist their socio-economic position in any way and the play focuses on the futility of the characters instead of the socially generated futility. Michael Pierse states that 'Mercier's play ends symbolically with a mock wedding, part of his youths' fantasy of growing up and their tragic inability to do so' (2011, p.81). This emphasises the futility of the characters as the characters themselves are presented as tragic not caught in tragic circumstances. This point is enhanced by the closing lines of the play:

MARTINA: It's cold, isn't it?
LIZ: Yeah.
Silence.
DUCKY: When does the sun come up?

> JOYCER: Does it matter, Ducky?
> *Silence.*
>
> (Mercier, 1985, p.131, Unpublished)

This sense of complete futility seems in direct conflict with Mercier's own statement that he intended 'to make heroes' out of his disenfranchised characters. The characters do not possess heroism, they reflect an economic situation but there seems no escape or solace for them in this. Margaret Llewellyn-Jones argues that Mercier's plays became part of an Irish dramatic revival during the 80s where 'emergent new writing about the "heroism" of urban life' was crucial to emerging new Irish cultural identities' (2002, p.101). Yet there is a dichotomy between the term hero and the perceived senselessness which is the theme of the play itself. In response to the comment made by Llewellyn-Jones, Mercier states:

> Yes, I did, of a certain type of urban life. I certainly wanted to make a hero of the ordinary person, and I certainly wanted to put that kind of person on stage and that character on stage who most people would not consider to be sufficiently heroic for theatre. But to find a way of making their tragedy of making their comedy just as theatrically important as anybody else's.
>
> (Mercier, 2014, personal interview)

While this is Mercier's own position, there is a mixed message in terms of the actual play itself. The deep sense of hopelessness rooted within the play leaves very little room for any heroic acts. Rather than expressing personal tragedy the characters themselves appear tragic, and it is this tragic nature that breeds comedy rather than an ownership of the comedy by the characters. This is shaky territory, as explained by bell hooks:

> Understanding marginality as a position and a place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as a sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonised, there that the freedom one longs for is lost.
>
> (1990, p.150-151)

As hooks contends collective despair stunts the imagination of the people who occupy the margins and puts their freedom at risk. In contrast to *Drowning* and the need for escape there is no sense that these 'wasters' will ever be anything more than just that, and that this is at their own behest. The social status of the people in the play is that of the dregs of society, as we are made aware of from the outset with the play title *Wasters*. While this could suggest a level of irony or a call to question stereotypical terminology, the play does not emancipate the characters from the title and they seem tragic. Christopher Murray emphasises that 'status distinctions among the poor began with the assumption that people are responsible for their actions and, specifically, responsible for taking care of themselves and their families as best they could' (Murray, 2015, p.180). Considering the developments over the last three decades not only in Ireland, but across the Western hemisphere, of a neoliberal attitude of accountability in regard to people experiencing economic scarcity, the attitudes in Mercier's play once again seem prophetic of things to come. While hooks warns of a deep seated nihilism affecting the imagination of the marginalised Ferdia MacAnna sees the fantastical dream world created by the gang as a site of resistance:

> Mercier's 'Wasters', ostensibly a bawdy tale of a young Dub who returns from London in an attempt to recapture old times with his childhood pals, is funny and poignant yet also an indictment of the apathy which breeds teenage disillusionment, urban despair, crime, emigration and the ever-present unemployment. The six young people at the centre of the drama have only their fantasies, acted out within the ritual of a northside cider-party, to sustain them against the harshness of their environment. Imagination is their only defence.
>
> (MacAnna, 1991, p.24)

hooks' description of 'deep nihilism' is found in *Wasters* as the bleak socio-economic landscape seem to offer no way out for the people caught in the cage of scarcity in the lower classes. Unlike Ma's budgies in *Drowning*, the characters seem destined to bang off the walls going 'apeshit' with no window to escape from. While the focus in *Wasters* is on the characters and the bleakness of their situation very little in the play acknowledges the wider structures, that determine the economic landscape they are caught within, which makes it difficult to fully understand the complexity of their situation and empathise with them. Their fate seems mostly their own rather than related to systemic structures. Brecht suggests that in order to have social impact 'a work of art lays bare the dialectical laws of movement of the social mechanism, whose revelation makes the mastering of human fate easier' (1964, p. 311). Without acknowledgement of the wider structures *Wasters* offers the characters as tragic masters of their own fate.

Passion Machine's work did bring a new language to the stage, one that could be heard along the streets of north Dublin daily, a language that projected an image, seemingly, of a slice of the life of the working-class Northsider, a language that was not at home on the Irish stage. This language was given an ambivalent reception by the Irish public. MacAnna notes that 'the Passion

Machine's "gurrier chic" outraged some purists but delighted Dublin audiences' (1991, p 24.). This early work inspired Roddy Doyle and his subsequent work, as noted by Michael Pierse in his *Writing Ireland's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey*:

> Doyle has remarked that by being invited to see Paul Mercier's play *Wasters* (1985) was a decisive moment in his own artistic development. The Production was 'fast and funny and wonderful but that wasn't it: for the first time in my life I saw characters I recognised, people I met every day, the language I heard every day [...] I'll never forget it'. His sense of excitement at seeing working class Dublin depicted on stage was a measure of how little that community was served by literature and popular culture.
>
> (Pierse, 2011, p247)

The work provided a template for future depictions of Dublin's Northside, a set of representations which became part of what Ferdia MacAnna, in 1991, dubbed the 'Dublin Renaissance' in which not only plays but prose literature dealt with subject matter which depicted the seemingly lower social orders of Dublin's class structure: 'Its emphasis was on the hyper local, individuated and anomalous narratives of those who confounded the expectations of a stultifying national culture' (Pierse, 2011, p 191). The social consciousness Mercier attempted to create in his early plays raises interesting questions for this project, about how representations of an underrepresented community can liberate, further stigmatise people in popular social culture or simultaneously do both. As previously mentioned, the images of the working class Northside community which the Passion Machine plays depicted were not rooted, according to MacAnna, in any previous form of theatrical framework, instead they 'were influenced more by local environment and modern pop culture, television,

advertising, rock and pop music, pub life etc. – than any theatrical precursor' (1991, p25). The main focus of the Passion Machine was to bring something new and vibrant to audiences and to entertain en masse. Mercier's early plays *Drowning* (1984) and *Wasters* (1985) delivered this raw entertainment to crowds of Northsiders, a new generation. According to Fintan O'Toole through the plays of the Mercier, 'the new Dublin and the generation that has grown up in it is being, finally, enfranchised in the Irish Theatre (2003, p.55). The demographic of the audience targeted by Passion Machine became an essential feature of their work as they were seen to bring 'to the stage many aspects of life in an area of Dublin which had been virtually ignored by Irish media and mainstream theatre' (Mac Anna, 1991, p24). While it was seen that the work of the Passion Machine was exclusive to the Northside of Dublin, it was not an intention of the Passion Machine to create a view that their work should be confined to one area of Dublin. During an interview Mercier was keen to emphasise that Passion Machine was not a Northside theatre company. While he said he had no problem being located on the north side, it just so happened that the majority of the issues explored in the plays of Passion Machine were being felt intensely on the north side of Dublin city, but they were also being felt on areas of the south side (Mercier, 2014). It is worth considering that one of the most important features of Passion Machine and subsequently Mercier's work was that 'the plays attracted many who had never set foot in a theatre before' (MacAnna, 1991, p24). Therefore, for a lot of people this was the first time they were able to engage with an image presented of their own lives. Mercier emphasises that this was a very conscious decision on behalf of Passion Machine:

> We went after the audience that was literally outside the theatre. [...] We went to the schools, went to factories, went to businesses, went to everybody and anybody. It was almost an act, again, of saying 'this is

> theatre for you, you know, you're more than welcome, we'll give you a cut price, we'll even do a deal where we will bring half of you in for nothing', we did everything to get the audience in. The demographic of the audience, the profile of the audience, you would have an extraordinary mix of people. You would have either local people or people who never went to the theatre, ever, and then you had people who went to the theatre all the time.
>
> (Mercier, 2014, Appendix)

This raises sharp questions as to what happens when an audience has their first opportunity to see a representation of their identity deeply rooted within nihilistic landscapes. There is a sense of creating an otherness by taking people's stories and repackaging them for consumption which relates to hooks' comment that:

> Often this speech about the 'other' annihilates, erases. No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it becomes mine, my own. [...] I am still author, authority [...] you are at the centre of my talk. Stop. We greet you as liberators.
>
> (hooks, 1990, p.84)

A cynical reading of Mercier's earlier plays contains the hallmarks of this author of authority. While the work itself served to open up a commentary of the issues being felt by the lower classes of Dublin what was lacking in the plays was any sense of the overall systems of social structuring in which the hyper local environment portrayed onstage existed. Brecht asserts that the 'life of the labouring population, the struggle of the working class for a worthwhile,

creative life is a pleasing theme for the arts' (1964, p. 308). Yet Brecht also is keen to assert that the mere presence of the working class onstage is not enough if the wider mechanisms of societal structure is not also exposed and explored. (1964, p. 301- 308). The whys and the wherefores were overlooked, creating a deep sense of an alienated community yet very little exploration of who is causing the alienation. Unfortunately, this seems to serve the operating dominant hegemony rather than offering any real sense of empowerment, thus compromising Mercier's intention. It would seem that the earlier work of the Passion Machine privileged an obligation to entertain at the risk of ignoring social responsibilities associated with the decision to represent an underrepresented class. Ferdia MacAnna claimed that for Passion Machine the 'primary purpose is to entertain, a task they rarely fail to accomplish even at the risk of alienating critics, social workers and literary and academic pedants who would like to see all theatre infused with massive dollops of social moralising' (1991, p. 25). Overlooking the social structures does not only alienate the critics, social workers and pedantic academics, it also alienates the real people who are represented onstage. According to Michael Pierse: 'literature of working class Dublin places that community in conflict with dominant cultural norms, expressing conflict with its alienation within the capitalist state through symbolism, form and the unearthing of submerged narratives from Irish history' (2011, p191). The work of Paul Mercier and the Passion Machine is paradoxical in this sense. While it brought the plight of the working and lower classes of the Northside into national conversation in Irish theatre it also imprisoned the Northside characters in a waste ground that perpetuates failure. In the context of the development of the Northside the lack of acknowledgement of the social stratification of Dublin ignores the lack of autonomy of lower and working class Northsiders and allows for them to become 'other'.

Chapter 4

Salty Chips, Loose Knickers and Domestic Violence: Roddy Doyle and the Northside Working Class

This chapter presents a critical analysis of plays and dramatic narratives presnted on TV by Roddy Doyle, a writer most widely known for his novels and film/television scripts. The decision to include him in a research project focused on dramaturgical and aesthetic strategies of play scripts is a deliberate one. Described as a 'worldwide popular author whose work vividly evokes the working class environment [...] north of Dublin' (Powell, 2004, p 95), Doyle's work has achieved international attention, and it is arguable that he has contributed most prominently, in recent decades, to influential representations of the perceived 'lower' classes on the Northside of Ireland's capital city. Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1987; film, 1991), and the endless debates it has engendered, can be said to have set the signature tune for much of Ireland in the 1990s (Gibbons in Kirby, Gibbons, Cronin, 2002, p.92). As a result of this, Doyle's work has been analysed heavily both academically and in popular fora. While the play texts will take precedence in this discussion, and previously unpublished plays which will be explored, the dramatic narratives of Doyle's recorded dramas and novels will also be explored in order to provide an accurate analysis of his work's significance in shaping dominant popular representations of the working class Northside Dubliner. An argument for a deep-seated nihilism associated with the working class in Doyle's work will be presented. This chapter will critique Ake Persson's location of Doyle's work within the theoretical framework of Homi K Bhabha's 'third space' (1994) in relation to Doyle's representation of the space in which Dublin's working class operates. Features of the representation of gender in Doyle's work are explored, in particular working-class women, through Bourdieu's lens of notions of

purity/ impurity. An argument will be developed using an iterative analysis, beginning with class, considering gender, then revisiting class in light of gender. I will argue that images of dirt and grit are over-emphasised when discussing perceived working and/or underclass of Dublin . Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas (2001) on the subject and placing notions of the pure/impure in cultural context, his plays *Brownbread* (1987), *War* (1989), *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (2001) will be a central focus of this discussion.

Roddy Doyle's novels were heavily criticised for shunning the traditional poetic language of established Irish novelists and playwrights and he insisted that his goal was to expose a side of Dublin that had previously been ignored, not only by mainstream culture, but also social policy and urban planning. It is common critique that 'from the start Roddy Doyle's career as a novelist has run counter to the prevailing preoccupations and conventions of Irish writing' (Donnelly, 2000, p.18). His plays will be explored in detail during the course of the chapter, but to introduce key aspects of the focus of this project, I will consider in this introduction his four part mini-series *Family* (1994), filmed in co-production by the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) and RTÉ (Radio Telefís Éireann), Ireland's national broadcaster. *Family* was a successor to Doyle's critically acclaimed novels and subsequent screenplays, *The Barrytown Trilogy.* Unlike the trilogy, which was set in the fictional north Dublin suburb of Barrytown, *Family* was more pointedly set in the iconic landscape of one of the north side's most popularly notorious areas, Ballymun. This was not favoured by the local people. 'One resident remarked, while Barrytown is imaginary, Ballymun's uniqueness is instantly recognisable' (Free, 2007, p60). In contrast with the generally 'romantic' image of the north suburbs painted in Doyle's trilogy, *Family* depicted graphic images of the 'hardships and deprivation of the Irish urban working-class' (Persson, 2012, p.138). The decision to set fictional characters in a very real location on Dublin's Northside, in order to attempt to

portray this deprivation, was extremely problematic. There are conflicting opinions on whether, through his work, Doyle championed the working class, becoming a voice for the voiceless, or contributed to further ostracising a community already suffering social stigma,

> Ballymun residents accused the BBC of heightening the setting's existing stigma through its story of a criminal and abusive husband and father, and through its visualisation; the BBC allegedly asked residents to remove curtains and brought burned out cars, old washing machines and litter to the estate
>
> (Free, 2007, p.59).

This mini-series in particular generated a local and a national furore with local people unhappy with the image given of their hometown and the general public unhappy with the image it offered of contemporary Ireland. 'Notably, *Family* contained violence, wife-battering, unemployment, alcoholism and a dysfunctional family, which in turn infuriated a great number of viewers who argued that Doyle had given a false image of Ireland' (Persson, 2012, p138). While there are positions which support and contest the representations in Doyle's work it can be argued that he is the source, and principal shaper of contemporary depictions of Dublin's north side and portrayals of its people which have circulated and been accepted as valid, nationally and internationally.

Cultural Commentator

Since Doyle established himself as a literary figure he has been framed as a cultural commentator. Ake Persson asserts that 'Doyle's texts set out, frequently implicitly, to explore values, norms and behaviour that have in various ways shaped and continue to dominate Irish society' (Persson, 2005, p.195). Doyle is one of a cohort of Dublin writers that emerged during the 80s, a

group that Ferdia MacAnna claims is responsible for a renaissance in Irish writing. MacAnna sees them as challenging what was deemed appropriate to be included in canons of an Irish literary culture, that had typically been romantically and exclusively rural. It centered on 'narrow and single minded definitions of Gaelic identity' (Ryder, 1998, p. 126) and ignored depictions of the urban landscape of Irish cities and the people contained within them. A counter-movement of urban-centered writing was not exclusive to 1980s Ireland; rather, it built upon the work of writers such as James Joyce (1882-1941), Sean O'Casey (1880-1964) and James McKenna (1933-2000) that preceded it. During the 1980s in Ireland there was a very purposeful 'revival' (MacAnna, 1991, p.26) of colloquial vernacular used by writers such as Sean O'Casey in the early part of the 20th century. Doyle helped spearhead this shift. His first novel, *The Commitments*, used a Northside vernacular and as Ake Persson notes; 'the northsiders' way of speaking is considered socially inferior and less acceptable' (2003, p.50), especially within literary culture. Doyle's first novel was perceived, not only to challenge established poetic and romantic depictions of rural Ireland within literary culture, but also to challenge the established societal structures of modern Ireland. It is within this novel that Doyle generated an image of his literary work as more that simply fiction but also social critique. One piece of dialogue most frequently examined as evidence for this comes from Jimmy Rabbitte, anti-hero, narrator and protagonist in *The Commitments*. Rabbittte comments on the local, national and international politics of Ireland in the 1980s:

> The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.
> They nearly gasped; it was so true.
> An' Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin' everythin'. An' the northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin.
> – Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud.

(Jimmy Rabbitte in Roddy Doyle's' *The Committments*, 1998, p.9)

This sequence alone seemed to immediately crystallise Doyle's use of his fictional narrative to criticise social, political and class structures of modern Ireland in the late 20th century.

Doyle's dramatic writing includes both live and recorded media. Although he is mostly known for his novels, his early plays were staged by Paul Mercier's Passion Machine (see discussion in Chapter 3). His first play, *Brownbread* (1987), was written on the insistence of his muse at the time, Paul Mercier, who also directed Doyle's plays. Doyle notes;

> They asked me to write a play. I'd just finished writing *The Commitments*; it was June 1986. I was about to write *The Snapper*. I'd never thought about writing a play. It had never been an ambition. If I hadn't been asked – if I'd been asked by anyone other than Paul Mercier and John Sutton –I'd never have written one.
>
> (Doyle, 1993, p.2)

In a review of the play in *The Sunday Tribune* in 1987, Fintan O'Toole wrote that '*Brownbread* has the most unlikely plot since Shakespeare wrote *Cymbeline* and it does roll along with a Pythonesque absurdity. Once you've grasped the fact that the logic of the piece is that there is no logic, there's not much more to it' (2003, p.58). This play encapsulates the nihilistic attitude towards the Dublin working class that is prevalent in a lot of Doyle's work, an attitude generally overlooked in critical discussion surrounding Doyle's plays in favour of a critique of the vernacular. In responding to this play, attention concentrated mainly on the use of sensational scenes portraying a suburban Dublin lifestyle. Åke Persson assserts that 'Doyle was accused of tampering

with and disturbing revered notions of Irishness and what Ireland represented'(2012, p.138).

Brownbread is set in Doyle's fictional Barrytown and opens with the kidnapping of a bishop from his confirmation duties by three young lads with a gun who bundle him into one of the boy's houses. It is an ambitious play that then follows the standoff between the kidnappers and An Garda Síochána until there is an elaborate rescue attempt by the Marine Corps, coming from America to save one of their own as it turns out that the bishop is 'a Yank' (Doyle, 1993, p.44). O'Toole, in 1987, commented:

> The sight of a bishop in full regalia stumbling over the threshold of a bedroom with cutesy Woolworths pictures on the wall is about an arresting an opening as can be imagined, but you can't help wondering whether everything else isn't bound to be an anti-climax.
>
> (O'Toole, 2003, p.58)

The play, however, is quite the opposite. It builds to a crescendo at the invasion of Dollymount Strand by the American Marine Corps of a rescue attempt that goes awry as the audience hear one of their helicopters crash in spectacular fashion and the Americans are left red faced, without the aimless Barrytown boys having lifted a finger. In his review of the play, Fintan O'Toole argues that it is the apparently realistic particularity of the working-class character types that makes the play's outlandish actions acceptable:

> The absurdity of *Brownbread* works dramatically, however, because it is built on a base of authenticity, a robust and supple recapturing of the speech and mannerisms of the working-class suburbs of Dublin.
>
> (O'Toole, 2003, p.58)

In this way, critical concentration on Doyle's use of a neglected vernacular within Irish theatre enables the problems with the overall respresentation to be overlooked. However, if the play lives by its characterisations, it is important to investigate, not just the surface characteristics, but the motivation, or lack of motivation, which the characters reveal as the reasoning behind their actions. There is none:

> **Bishop** (*retreating*) Alright.
> (*Advancing*) But, lads, - do you not see how you're – walking yourselves into quite dreadful, dreadful trouble?
> *The lads shrug and look at each other, and shrug.*
> **Bishop** A period in jail.
> *The lads shrug.*
> **Bishop** Ten years?
> *No reaction*
> **Bishop** You'll be unemployable.
> *The lads grin, looking at the* ***Bishop*** *as if he's a bit simple.* ***Ao*** *laughs.*
> **Bishop** (*retreating*) Alright. – But d'you mind me asking –
> Why did you, eh, kidnap me?
> *The lads sit up: this could be fun. They look to* ***Ao*** *for the answer*
> **Ao** Well,we had the gun, an' you were in Barrytown doin' the confirmations, an' there was nothin' on the telly; yeh know; snooker or cricket –
> **John** Or 'Live at Three'with Derek an' Thelma.
> **Ao** So we said, "Fuck it; let's kidnap him", - An' that's it really
> **John** Yeah; that's it.
> **Bishop** Oh. – So, Ao, you did it because you had nothing else to do. Is that right?
> **Ao** No not really

*The **Bishop** looks lost*

Ao I'd say we'd've done it annyway. Even if there had been snooker on.

Bishop But you did it because you were bored.

Ao – No

Bishop You said something about jobs to the police.

Ao I just said tha' –That's just an excuse, like. – I wouldn't mind a job but. The few bob, yeh know.

John Yeah.

Ao I'm sick o' buyin' my kaks in Dunnes. Three pairs a year.

(Doyle, 1993, p.40-41)

This scene roots the play in a deep seated nihilism which, once the comedy and wit is peeled back and one can look past the vernacular, emerges as an organising trope within Doyle's work. In his first novel *The Commitments* Doyle was lauded for portraying an unemployed working class, their dreams of putting together a band and making it to the big time. The dramatic narrative centres on a young, idealistic group of working class, Northside youths attempting to follow their dreams but ultimately failing. This it seems was an inevitable outcome, as dialogue from the screenplay of the film tells us:

Joey the Lips: Look I know you're hurting now but in time you'll see what you've achieved

Jimmy: I've achieved nothing.

Joey the lips: Ahh you're missing the point. The success of the band was irrelevant. You raised their expectations of life. You lifted their horizons. Sure we could have been famous and made albums and stuff but that would have been predictable. This way it's poetry.

Jimmy: It's a pisser is what it is Joey.

(Clement, La Frenais and Doyle, 1991)

This narrative of lifted horizons that inevitably end in failure is also seen in the preceding work of Passion Machine. There are comparisons between the failure experienced by the characters in the play *Studs* (1986) and the failure of *The Commitments*. Coincidentally Doyle was inspired by the work of Passion Machine and *Studs* was his particular favourite:

> I saw it five times in its three week run. It was the story of a Sunday morning soccer team. Eleven players in black body-stockings and too-long shorts danced, ran and slow-motioned their way through the rounds of the Cup into the final, and lost. They were eleven men I knew. And the manager, I knew him as well. I was upset when they lost although I knew they would. *Studs* was perfect. It was my favourite play.
>
> (Doyle, 1989, p.1)

This glorification of failure could be seen as demonstrative of a shift in attitudes to a more postmodern style of thinking: a deep seated nihilism evident in plays and literature of the time. Doyle's work emerged during a time of great flux, during which modern consciousness was being challenged by postmodernity and that the effects of this pervade his writing. In *Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (1988), David M. Levin charts a transition from modern to postmodern and in doing so captures a philosophy of thinking that could be attributed to the work of Roddy Doyle:

> It is this consciousness of our situation which separates us from modernity; but postmodern discourse is not only a discourse which takes as its problem the experience of a crisis; it is also a discourse which is itself in crisis: a discourse without grounds, without a subject, without an origin, without any absolute center, without reason.
>
> (Levin, 1988, p.5)

Doyle's complex relationship to postmodern dynamics is evident in the use of a family discourse that operates around an absolute centre. 'He reveals contemporary Irish family life to be self-consuming and subject to the very strictures he seeks to deny: the traditional stranglehold of family, the inevitability of gossip and public critique, and the denial of individual will or mobility' (McGlynn, 2005, p.142). Despite a deep seated nihilism Doyle's work does not embody a crisis of the individual, but instead re-imposes the societal strictures it claims to react against.

Misogyny, purity and domestic violence

> In the cultural field, purity and impurity discourses are strategically mobilized in the affirmation of the specificity of the cultural field as a domain oriented towards essence, in the course of strategic social practice.
>
> (Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1199)

Roddy Doyle's work is famous, or infamous, depending on the critical viewpoint, for the use of violent language and imagery. Even within his comedies, violence permeates the narrative and creeps in, sometimes almost unnoticed. At the time in which his work was being written (80s, 90s), Doyle was hailed by many critics for exposing a side of Irish life that was a crack metaphorically papered over by an Ireland thrust into modernity and attempting to 'reinvent' a desirable image of itself (McCarthy, 2003). In Doyle's novels *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1997) and *Paula Spencer* (2007), Eamon Maher argues that Doyle 'comes to grips with societal change in Ireland in a more systematic and ultimately convincing manner. [T]hey chart the move from the Ireland of the 1970s and 80s right through to the early twentieth-first century' (2007, p.158-159). *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* was developed

from the original story of Paula Spencer for the BBC TV series *Family* (1991) and was subsequently adapted for the stage in 2001. Set in the town of Ballymun on Dublin's Northside, it is the story of one woman's experience of domestic abuse, not only within her marriage, but from the onset of puberty. Dermot McCarthy praises Doyle, not only for giving a voice to the victims of domestic abuse, but for making the 'poor urban Irish'(McCarthy, 2003, p.155) visible by writing them into presence in national conversation, Doyle does this, in the *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, by exposing the 'grim reminder that for those already living on the economic and social margins of Irish society, the new prosperity merely pushed them further from the centre' (McCarthy, 2003, p.155). This grim reminder is delivered through images of dirt, violence and chaos.

The defining feature of *Family, The Woman Who Walked into Doors* and *Paula Spencer* is that they deal explicitly with domestic violence in a 'dark and vicious' way (McCarthy, 2003, p.17). However, while the themes of domestic violence take centre stage in these works, themes of domestic and psychological violence can be seen from the very earliest stages of Doyle's work, reflecting the incremental stages of abuser/abused behaviour. The violence begins slowly, through mannerisms and speech in his early plays, and builds to crescendo in' brutal scenes of physical, mental and emotional violence, in *Family* and the stage version of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*. In Doyle's very first play *Brownbread* (1987), the seeds of misogyny take root from the very first act when Mrs Murray tries to talk sense into her son John who has, with two of his friends, taken a Bishop hostage. Mr Farrell, the father of another one of the boys remarks to the 'Plain clothes' Garda;

> **Farrell** (*to* **Plain-clothes**) Hey; would your mot talk as much as tha'?
> **Plain-clothes** She wouldn't be let.

> *They laugh; 'man's' laughter. Uniform tries to join in. Mrs Murray stares them out of it.*
>
> (Doyle, 1993, p.27)

This blatant, almost overlooked, patriarchal dominance is delivered through a throwaway line in the midst of a chaotic scene of hostage taking and negotiation. The misogyny is overt and in a sinister way completely undermines the character of Mrs Murray. Despite her visual scorn, Mrs Murray does not directly challenge the comment. His next play *War* (1989), pushed this even further, as noted in Fintan O'Toole's review of the play in *The Irish Times* on the 21st October 1989:

> Everything has been funny, even the disasters and the agonies, the fights and the nervous breakdowns. Suddenly we are in George's house, in the kitchen. A row develops between George and his wife, Bridget, a row in which George is the aggressor, picking on his wife, making little of her, moving in on her, coming very close to striking her, forcing her to run out saying: 'You're not going to bully me'. George says: 'I just did'.
>
> (O'Toole, 2003, p.87-88)

In the second part of the *The Barrytown Triology* (1992), *The Snapper*, the plot develops around Doyle's main character, Sharon (Rabbitte in the novel version, Curley in the film version) and the effects of her illegitimate pregnancy. Most criticism around both the film and novel reads Doyle's second instalment to *The Barrytown Trilogy* as a 'sentimental comic resolution to a potentially home wrecking situation' (2003 McCarthy, p.54). It is the pregnancy that is the catalyst for dramatic action yet the narration focuses on Sharon's 'pregnancy and its effect on herself, her family and most importantly, her father' (McCarthy, 2003, p.53). As McCarthy's critique suggests, despite the

pregnancy as catalyst it is the character of Jimmy Rabbitte Senior and his reaction to the pregnancy that dominate the dramatic narrative. What is most problematic about this is that this is no mere unwed mother; Sharon is raped by a neighbour when she is intoxicated and incoherent in a car park at a party. The rape is never challenged directly and instead the issue becomes Sharon dealing with the resulting pregnancy in an Ireland where 'pregnancy and related matters – contraception, abortion, unmarried mothers – were much in the news' (McCarthy, 2003, p.53). The problematic focus of Doyle's narrative is highlighted by Mary McGlynn: '*The Snapper* is hardly a warm story. A less compliant reading of Doyle's story could characterize the plot thus: the acquaintance rape of Sharon Rabbitte, a young woman who braves neighbourhood jibes as she carries her baby, is interwoven with the tale of her father, Jimmy, and his efforts to come to terms with her pregnancy' (McGlynn, 2005, p.141). As is documented by McCarthy, despite the rape of a young woman the focus of the narrative is placed on the patriarch of the family, and his difficulty dealing with the situation. 'Sharon's willingness to take charge of her unwanted pregnancy becomes eclipsed, both structurally and narratologically, by Jimmy's imperative to regain control of his household and his social milieu' (McGlynn, 2005, p.142). These instances of misogyny predate the BBC series *Family* that introduces Paula Spencer and her vicious husband Charlo.

The violence experienced by Paula Spencer at the hands of her husband is explored in a variety of ways by Doyle. First there was the BBC series *Family*. The series consists of four episodes each an hour long. Each episode is told from the point of view of a different member of the Spencer family; Charlo Spencer, the Da, John Paul Spencer, the son, Nicola Spencer, the daughter and finally Paula Spencer, the mother. This focus on the family members' differing perspectives is a recognisably modernist literary strategy; still holding onto grand narratives of home and family yet separating out the component elements

and exposing the singular narratives within the family itself. Each episode highlights the effect of the violent household on each member of the family. *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (1997), a novel written in the form of a 'retrospective narrative' (McCarthy, 2003, p.157) gives deeper insight into the mind of Paula Spencer, illustrating her complicated relationships with men, sex and alcohol. The success of the novel prompted Doyle, along with Joe O'Byrne, to adapt the script for the stage in 2001. The subsequent play enjoyed an extensive national tour. Critical analysis, for the purpose of this study, will focus on the scripted stage version of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* (2001).

The Woman Who Walked into Doors uses vivid violent imagery which warrants the description 'dark and vicious'(McCarthy, 2003, p.157). It is the climactic expression of violence which, this thesis argues, can be seen building in Doyle's work; starting in *Brownbread*, with the insinuation of violence, intensifying in *War* with scenes of psychological violence on the verge of physical violence, culminating in vicious beatings in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*:

> **Paula** Broken nose. Loose teeth. Cracked ribs. Broken finger. Black eyes. I once had two at the same time, one fading, the other new. Shoulders, elbows, knees, wrists. Stitches in my mouth. Stitches on my chin. A ruptured eardrum. Burns. Cigarettes on my arrns and legs. Thumped me, kicked me, pushed me, burned me. He butted me with his head. He held me still and butted me. He dragged me around the house by my clothes and by my hair. He kicked me up, he kicked me down the stairs. Bruised me, scalded me, threatened me. For seventeen years. Hit me, thumped me, raped me. seventeen years. Threw me into the garden.

> Threw me out of the attic. Fists, boots, knee, head. Bread knife, sauce-pan, brush. Tore out clumps of my hair. Cigarettes, lighter, ashtray. He set fire to my clothes. He locked me out and he locked me in. He hurt me and hurt me and hurt me. He killed parts of me. He killed most of me. He killed all of me. Bruised, burnt and broken. Bewitched bothered and bewildered. Seventeen years. He never gave up. Months went by and nothing happened, but it was always there - the promise of it.
>
> (Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p.33)

It is scenes like this that evoked huge praise for Doyle for exposing a dark underbelly existing in Irish culture, and the praise was attributed to Doyle giving a voice to abused women. The character of Paula Spencer was largely perceived in academic criticism to demonstrate the full complexities of an actual person experiencing domestic violence. One result of this was that the character of Paula Spencer has even been used for discussion in educating members of the medical profession. One particular discussion was conducted by Ann Jay, who uses the experiences of the character of Paula Spencer when discussing the complexities of dealing with patients who are victims of domestic violence:

> Paula is, of course, a fiction, a product of Roddy Doyle's imagination, but such a rich and rounded product that I find it easy to think of her as a patient. Indeed she is so well written that it is actually quite difficult not to regard her as real.
>
> (2000, p.58)

Some feminist responses even praise Doyle for seemingly portraying an empowered character despite the abuse she experiences during her pubescent years and also over the course of her seventeen year marriage. 'Verbal abuse not only puts the novel's protagonist "into place" but ironically it also empowers her to the extent that the adoption of abusive language offers a means of self-defence and retaliation' (Mildorf, 2006, p.107). It very difficult to find criticism of Doyle that equates his work with misogynistic thinking yet there is an argument that what is offered by Doyle is much more complex than simply challenging an issue which has previously been metaphorically swept under the carpet in Irish society.

There are subtleties within the text that, when looked at through a lens of purity and impurity, discussed by Mary Douglas in her text *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (2001), suggest that both Sharon and Paula exist within a culture of impurity that makes the 'tragic' experiences they endure, inevitable. This is in line with Duschinsky and Lampitts reading of Pierre Bourdieu's philosophy; 'Bourdieu suggests that women are situated as a "source from which impurity and dishonour threaten to enter", with the purity of cultivated feminine nature always at risk of being breached by either an inner tendency or an external vulnerability to impurity' (Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1199). This is demonstrated early in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* through Paula's memories of her first year of secondary school during the onset of her early puberty: 'I had to act rough and think dirty. I had to fight.'(Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p.5). A vocabulary alluding to dirt and filth linked with sexualised behaviour and violence is a dominant feature of the script as a whole. Notions of purity and impurity are bred from ideas of what is pure or clean being associated with moral righteousness and what is soiled or dirty more commonly associated with degradation in society. It is widely discussed in theories of misogyny that there is a method of oppression

of women by creating an image of them being unclean or uncouth. This misogyny has deeps roots in history, especially rooted in religious and theological practices globally.

> The Christian Bible, the Muslim Quran, the Hebrew Torah, and Buddhist and Hindu scriptures condemn woman, not only for her spiritual defects, but also for her body, which they deride in the crudest terms. All these great religions blame woman for the lust, licentiousness, and depravity that men are prone to, and for committing the original sin or its theological equivalent.

(Gilmore, 2001, p.5)

However, in the late 20th and early 21st century, the dominance in western society of religion's ability to shape popular ideology diminished yet, as Bourdieu highlights, contemporary ideology shows significant influence from previous religious dominance:

> Like the religious field, spheres of cultural practice are separated in western societies as relatively autonomous realms through the development of a 'public of potential consumers' and 'an ever-growing, ever more diversified corps of producers', as well as 'the multiplication and diversification of agencies of consecration' (1993[1971]: 112).

(Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1198)

Women, especially women in poverty, still suffer misogynistic framing of their sexuality as unclean or dirty; an insidious method of legitmising class structure. These concepts of impurity pervade Doyle's work, most prominently in *Family* and *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*. Adherence to an ideology of purity versus impurity to frame a public issue affirms 'the specificity of the cultural field as a domain oriented towards essence, in the course of strategic social

practice' (Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1199). In this case, it localises it as belonging to a particular social class and has the effect of confirming structures which maintain social stratification. This is explained by Mary Douglas;

> [I]deas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between with and without, above and below, male and female, with and against that a semblance of order is created.
>
> (2002, p.4)

Imposing a system protects the form of society and distinguishes the form from the non form, or margins, by portrying the other as dirty. Demonising the sexuality of women in poverty is ultimately a method of asserting dominant, and in this case neoliberal, ideology. Demarcating transgressions is not limited to complexities of female sexuality being challenged by males. It also exists in the complexities of female relationships, as a system of sexual repression is imposed from generation to generation resulting from legitimising stratgies that generate an internal oppression of the mind in the lower and working classes. In the novel even Paula's mother has an openly negative reaction to her changing from child to adolescent, which is also touched upon in the play when Paula describes her first pregnancy and her fears;

> I'd read nothing; I knew nothing about it. I thought I was, carrying some sort of a monster. I didn't know about water retention or anything. My mother told me nothing. I was completely clueless.
>
> (Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p24-25)

In isolation this could seem like embarrassment from an older generation to discuss matter of sex and child birth as was commonplace in Ireland of the time.

Yet coupled with the angry response Paula recalls in the novel where her mother walks out on her, when she realises her child is developing breasts, provides an image of inherent contempt for female sexuality as embedded within society. What is problematic is that these attitudes coupled with 'dirty' imagery and vocabulary work in tandem to imprison women, especially women in poverty, in this cycle of sexual uncleanness:

> The construction of the feminine as either pure or impure legitimates masculine possession, protection and control of women to ensure that impurity does not enter; masculinity is situated as relatively pure – and this relative purity serves as a tacit norm against which the purity or impurity of women are compared.
>
> (Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1199)

Ironically, despite *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* being hailed as liberating for women under male oppression, the construction of Paula through a language of impurity and all of her sexual encounters pertaining to dirty encounters produces an underlying discourse of misogynistic dominance attacking the very essence of feminine sexuality. This is highlighted in the play script very early on where all of the imagery is generated through a language relating to dirt and filth, all tied up with Paula's early encounters with her sexuality. No male in her life is trustworthy, they are perceived as feral and animalistic yet this is also presented a character flaw inherent in Paula;

> **Paula**:
>
> I had to be hard, the minute I walked into that kip. The teachers, Jesus. Mister Waters and his wandering fingers, and Dillon and his wandering snot, they made me feel filthy. There was something about me that drew them to me; that made them touch me. It was my tits that I was too young for; I'd no right to them. It was my hair. It was my legs and my arms and

> my neck. There were things about me that were wrong and dirty. I thought that then; I felt it. I didn't say it to anybody; I wouldn't have known how to, and I wouldn't have wanted to. I was a dirty slut in some way that I didn't understand and couldn't control; I made men and boys do things. I used to smell myself to see if it was that, some sort of a scent that I could wash off and they'd leave me alone and it could all go back to normal. There was no smell and it never did go back to normal.
>
> (Doyle, O'Byrne 2001, p.5)

The blame for the poor behaviour of the men around Paula is presented as a result of something specific to her. She says 'there was something about me that drew them to me'. This legitmises the harrassment experience by Paula. She is never relieved from this blame, even in her own mind, and is presented wholly in impure form. This notion of a 'dirty slut' itself attacks the very essence of female sexuality by creating a binary that provides a framework within which the presence of dirt, or impurity, insinuates that what is missing is purity. Duschinsky and Lampitt argue that purity and impurity 'can be used to performatively construct the essence against which they merely appear to compare phenomena or forms of subjectivity. To call you a "dirty slut", for example, is not simply a categorization of you as an individual, but also imputes an essence to femininity from which your behaviour indicates that you have departed' (Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1195). This impurity pervades all of Paula's sexual encounters in the play. Not once does Paula have a positive sexual encounter. Her first sex act is conducted in the classroom, which Paula casually recalls in the beginning of the play, babbling to the Guard, Gerard, who has just informed her of her husband, Charlo's, ultimate demise. There is no relief for the character. She never once has an encounter which is described in any terms that suggest any positive or romantic feelings. Everything is surface, primal, and largely dictated by the male despite Paula's insistence on her sexual

power. When Paula describes the first time she and Charlo ‘make love’ (Doyle, O’Byrne, 2001, p.16) it is preceded by a scene where he literally eats chips from her knickers and when Charlo returns the underwear he tells her to ‘mind the vinegar’ (Doyle, O’Byrne, 2001, p.16) when she puts them back on. Despite it being described as making love the scene depicted of their first time together continues with the trope of visceral images of dirt and filth tied up with sexuality:

> PAULA: God, girls; O I had to marry him after that. (to audience): He wasn't gorgeous. There was never anything gorgeous about him. When we made love the first time in the field when we were drunk, especially me, and I didn’t really know what was happening, only his weight and wanting to get sick. It would have helped if he'd been gorgeous, like Robert Redford or Lee Majors. They'd have picked me up and carried me home; they wouldn't have fucked me in a field in the first place. Charlo stood up.
>
> CHARLO: Fuckin' cold.
>
> PAULA: He wiped his prick on the inside of his bomber jacket, I swear to God he did. Gorgeous men didn't do that kind of thing. But he was a ride. He had a scar.
>
> (Doyle, O’Byrne, 2001, p.16)

What is problematic is that throughout the play, novel, and series there is no escape from these gritty images: no balance of joy or any real laughter which makes the categorisation of the work as realism extremely difficult to maintain. This makes the use of the characters for case studies in social, cultural or medical studies particularly worrying.

One of the defining features of this play, which was outlined by the televised series *Family*, was that, unlike Doyle's previous plays and novels, the Spencer family were located in a very real suburb on the northside of Dublin, Ballymun, as opposed to the fictional suburb of Barrytown. Making the notions of purity and impurity not strictly gender based but also class and geographically specific, supported an impression of Doyle's work being a cultural commentary. These notions operate to demarcate, as Duschinsky and Lampitt (2012, p.1199) argue, lines of social stratification. The impure imagery created is not restricted to sexual encounters but is also used when describing place in *The Woman Who Walked in Doors* when Paula recalls her first flat in the north inner city:

> Paula:
>
> It was nice, the flat - except for the smell when you came in the hall door downstairs, the warm, sweating smell of old cabbage and nappies. Even the damp patch in the living room had a pattern that made it look deliberate. Living room, bedroom, kitchen. We shared the bathroom and toilet with four other flats. There were some right dirtbirds and weirdos on our floor. I was always a bit nervous coming out onto the landing.
>
> (Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p.21)

There is seemingly nothing at all that shines light in this bleak environment portrayed by Doyle. 'Using the Ballymun estate in north Dublin as the setting, *Family* is very much [...] – an uncompromising, "in your face" urban docu-drama' (McCarthy, 2003, p.157). The BBC's approach to 'dressing' the estate prior to filming makes the categorisation of an entirely fictional work as a 'docu-drama' problematic: Especially when the community at the centre is an extremely stigmatised community struggling to maintain a semblance of agency, within a nation state of growing inequality, and a popular cultural

image wholly grounded in stereotypes. The use of stereotypes imprisons a community within a particular popular image and causes significant problems in the attempt to form a viable identity:

> Stereotype threat is a situational experience in which an individual feels vulnerable and pressured by the possibility of confirming or being judged by a stereotype. This threatening experience leads to performance decrements, even among highly skilled individuals
>
> (Smith, 2004, p.177).

As noted by Duschinsky and Lampitt, the notion of what is pure and impure works to further accentuate inaccurate representations:

> [P]urity and impurity discourses are both facilitated by and contribute to the emergence of institutionalized fields able to facilitate sustained discourses on the truth of reality, and on the extent to which particular phenomena or forms of subjectivity are in correspondence with this ideal.
>
> (Duschinsky and Lampitt, 2012, p.1200)

The discourse surrounding what is perceived as truth and reality are positioned as equivalent to the image presented of what is pure, and this aspirational ideal is at constant risk of becoming entrenched in culture. As noted by Richard Kearney in his text *On Stories* (2002) it is essential for discourse to be critical of fixed images in order to avoid this. Against criticisms of his work, particularly *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, Doyle has claimed that he does not have a particular agenda he is trying to push or a personal manifesto to which he adheres (McCarthy, 2003, p.157). There is conflicting information from interviews with Doyle as to whether the categorisation of his work as docu-drama or cultural commentary reflects his own actual intentions. This emphasises the point previously made that Doyle's work being used for social,

cultural or medical case studies is problematic. Ulrike Paschal confirms Doyle's use of stereotypes, suggesting that he even heightens the stereotypical representation within his writing;

> Roddy Doyle, Ferdia MacAnna and Paul Mercier, work exactly with these stereotypes, even amplifying them, which make their novels and plays a lot more fun to read and watch, without them being any less concerned with the problems plaguing the city.
>
> (1998, p.39).

The stereotype of the Dublin 'Northsider' has become well documented in popular culture. Dividing the city into two stereotypes one clean, crisp well spoken and located on the south side of the city; the other unclean, dishevelled, with a strong accent and located on the north side of the city. The clear divide between the pure ideal and the impure underdog is firmly rooted in popular Irish culture. One need only view the popular RTÉ comedy programme *Damo and Ivor* (2011) to prove this point. This division in the spatial topography of Dublin marked by a categorisation of the inhabitants through amplified stereotypes is accurately defined in cultural terms through in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*.

Habitus and oppression in the work of Roddy Doyle

What is problematic about Doyle's work being categorised as case study for cultural commentary is the strict stereotypes it adheres to, and as noted by Paschal, even amplifies. Far from being a force for empowerment in the face of cultural demonization, Doyle's writing is part of a wider culture of ideological control; working much like propaganda in that it manipulates a truth to give a distorted message. Yet underlying themes, such as the previously discussed nihilism and notions of purity and impurity, expose the difficulties in this work being an emancipator for the community it represents, as has been previously

claimed. Combining Bourdieu's theory of habitus with the position of Elif Shafak regarding the politics of fiction, highlights the problematic position of fiction that reinforces stereotype. Firstly, the theory of habitus suggests that local conditions work in tandem with societal structures to create communities caught in cyclical patterns of behaviour, condemned to repeat learned systems and modes of living continue because of a chronic lack of opportunity for experience outside this cycle. This insight provides a framework which emphasises the danger of generating and circulating further human stereotypes that, because they are entertaining, reinforce this already established cyclical behaviour. Secondly, Shafak discusses the term 'cultural ghettos' (Shafak, 2010) which build metaphorical walls, or in some cases literal walls, between cultures that differ in some way and serve to create elitist or extreme communities, characterised by a lack of social cohesion, understanding and tolerance. A combination of these viewpoints helps to explain how Doyle's work serves more to entertain the middle and upper classes than it does to empower the lower social classes as it reinforces a stereotype that maintains these stratified social structures.

> The concept of habitus begins from both an experiential and a sociological conundrum. Experientially, we often feel we are free agents yet base everyday decisions on assumptions about the predictable character, behaviour and attitudes of others. Sociologically, social practices are characterized by regularities – working-class kids tend to get working-class jobs (as Willis 1977, put it), middle-class readers tend to enjoy middle-brow literature, and so forth – yet there are no explicit rules dictating such practices.
>
> (Maton in Grenfell, 2012, p.50)

It is commonplace to describe events happening in cycles, recognising patterns in nature as well as in societal structures and experiences. Bourdieu uses the theory of habitus to explain this in terms of how society is formed and continues along drawn lines despite the high public profile given to challenges such as poverty or suffering. Drawing on the previous quote, working class kids tend to get working class jobs, unemployed parents tend to have children who also become unemployed or become low level, unskilled workers. There is a cycle. Learned behaviour coupled with societal pressures similar to those detailed in the above quote demonstrates how *habitus* can be seen in practice. Bourdieu defines the individuals caught up in habitus as within a framework of 'structure and structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.170). Karl Maton astutely explains:

> It is "structured" by one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is "structuring" in that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices. It is a "structure" in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This "structure" comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices.
>
> (Maton in Grenfell, 2012, p.50)

This cyclical structure is seen through the experiences of Doyle's characters. However, most criticisms claim that the characters challenge the rigid structures of their oppression. For example, in *The Commitments* the act of 'setting up a soul band becomes a kind of community action', according to Ake Persson, 'and a strategy to resist a sense of worthlessness created by unemployment' (2006, p.69). Dermot McCarthy states that; '*The Snapper* continues Doyle's representation of an Ireland in change [it] shifts focus to the working-class family and the challenges it faces when it attracts the attention of the

community' (2003, p.85). Jamila Mildorf praises *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* for positively affecting the discourse around domestic violence:

> The novel thus demonstrates the inescapability of the vicious circle that verbal abuse engenders and perpetuates. Thus, the novel not only raises awareness about the complexities of verbal abuse but also contributes to and potentially helps modify contemporary discourses on the problem.
>
> (2005, p.107)

Dermot McCarthy also praises *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* claiming that it 'can be read as an expression of this sense of a serious duty and calling, representing as it does the voice of a character whose dignity and self-identity have been traduced to the point of erasure and who has decided to *write* back, to speak herself, and thereby speak herself into presence' (McCarthy, 2003, p.17). Most noticeable praise for Doyle that conflicts with the position of this study is from Ake Persson in his article 'Between Displacement and Renewal: The Third Space in Roddy Doyle's Novels' (2006). Also utilizing a framework established through the theories of Homi Bhabha, Persson generates a point of view that aligns the social world depicted in Doyle's work to Bhabha's theory of 'Third Space' which is:

> [C]haracterised by what could be termed 'everyday resistance.' Closely related to survival tactics, this type of resistance is local in nature, tentative and cautious, and aims less at inverting or antagonizing existing domains of power than it does at hybridizing them, perhaps introducing new planes of instability, new ways of "making do," new combinations of sociality, and among the powerful, unexpected experiences of self-reflexive doubt.
>
> (Persson, 2006, p.59-60)

Persson suggests that Doyle's work portrays pockets of Irish society existing within the described third space. This third space can be seen as a place with transformative potential. The hybridisation of existing structures to make do advocates for a form of resilience within the represented community. Significantly, 'the third space at grassroots level is seen as a potentially transformative force, in contrast to the reproductive role which purely service-oriented, charity or philanthropic organisations may play' (Persson, 2006, p.61). This form of resistance is supposed by Persson to be found in the forming of the band in *The Commitments*, establishing the fast food truck in *The Van* or in the act of Paula Spencer speaking herself into existence in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*. However, as is previously discussed, these events are ultimately rooted in deep nihilism doomed to failure: the band fails, the van is drunkenly driven into the sea and despite Paula's freedom from Charlo, she has to then endure her son, John Paul's, descent into addiction. While a claim could be made that these are examples of experiences that exist in reality, there is very little offered in the way of showing any real achievement or potential to realise ambition within the life of Doyle's characters. Lois McNay in her article 'Agency and Experience: Gender as a Lived Relation' (2004) accurately describes the difficulty with placing singular experience as central when forming critiques of cultural structures: 'The essence of social being is not encompassed in experience itself but it does only begin to reveal itself through experience which must then be situated in a broader context' (McNay, 2004, p.184). The broader context is key here; there should be something portrayed that is beyond experience to accurately define fictional work as an accurate contribution to cultural analysis. The walls of the social structure in which Doyle's characters exist are thick and remain ultimately unchallenged by the author/playwright. According to Shafak fictional stories should 'transcend borders' (2010), so as to generate a knowledge that is beyond what is currently

known. 'Knowledge that takes you not beyond yourself is far worse than ignorance.' (Shafak, 2010) Otherwise, as it stated by Shafak, communities become isolated in 'cultural ghettos':

> Communities of the like minded is one of the greatest dangers in today's globalised world, and it is happening everywhere, among liberals and conservative, agnostic and believers, the rich and the poor, east and west alike. We tend to form clusters based on similarity and then we produce stereotypes about other clusters of people.
>
> (Shafak, 2010, TEDGlobal)

This isolation generates elitist groups, extremism and oppression. If this third space does exist, it is culturally engineered, and common stereotypes work to further divide communities located in it. By amplifying a stereotype within a nihilistic discourse Doyle 'effectively sanction[s] the middle-class constructions of privacy and privilege that [he] is often read as wanting to resist' (McGlynn, 2005, p.142). Doyle is so often credited with giving voice to the voiceless. As with Paula Spencer he is revered for giving a victim of domestic violence a voice and in doing so giving a voice to lower classes. It is undoubtedly problematic when representations of the working and lower classes are nonexistent but it is equally problematic when the representation provided contributes to pejorative cultural representations. This is emphasised by McCarthy's critique that:

> *Family* and *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* compose an obscene scream in the face of a complacent middle class that did not want to know about alcoholism, spousal and sexual abuse, professional blindness and institutional apathy.

(2003, p.156)

Worryingly issues such as sexual abuse and alcoholism seem to be problems isolated to the lower classes. Reiterating Mary McGlynn the pretence that these issues portrayed in Doyle's work could be focused away from the middle classes as if they only existed among the working class in Irish society further stigmatised the people Doyle claims to seek to empower.

Arguably most problematic of all is Roddy Doyle's own categorisation of his work. According to Ake Persson, in his 2012 article 'You're fuckin amazing by the way', Doyle has always been purposeful in locating his work within a political sphere. Doyle situates his own upbringing within a lower middle class framework, yet despite this he 'has in several interviews declared his affinities with the Dublin working-class' (Persson, 2012, p 141). He claims his work is an attempt to provide a podium for the voices lost through hegemonic structures that define what is documented as history.

> All [my] characters, in a way, are confronted by the reality of their isolation. They live in a society […] that has no interest in them whatsoever. They're not even statistics really. They are officially, but it never goes beyond that. Unfortunately, it hasn't changed all that much. They live on the periphery. They look for themselves on the television and they're not there, so culturally they don't exist.
>
> (Doyle in Reynolds, 2004, p. 24-25)

It would seem that Doyle has framed himself as an ambassador of sorts for the people he has deemed to have no outlet for self representation. The question this poses is how the narrative structure of his works qulifies to represent a culture that is described as without a voice of their own? Persson clamins that 'Doyle makes the crucial point that the official history, that is, the official narrative

constructed by historians and politicians, tends to exclude grassroot voices, and he implicitly and explicitly sees it as his task in his fiction to let these voices be heard in what ultimately becomes a political project' (2012, p142). Doyle says 'if I were to write a book in a more solidly middle class setting and I needed [detailed] knowledge, I'd have to go off and find it, whereas if I'm writing about working class context, I rarely have to research it, it seems to be in me already' (Doyle in Paschel, 1998, p.151). This emphasises the problem of placing Doyle's work within a political framework, and raises questions of how an actual existing culture can be accurately represented without any sort of research. Elif Shafak tackles this issue when she states that 'writers are entitled to their political opinions, and there are good political novels out there, but the language of fiction is not the language of politics' (2010, TEDGlobal). This blurring of lines between the political and the fictional in the classification of Doyle's writing presents problems when he is championed as a representative for a whole community of underrepresented people. Doyle was described by Charles Foran in 1996 as 'the most commercially successful Booker winner' (p.60). Cultural theorist Raymond Williams defines commercialism as a 'system which puts financial profit before any other consideration' (1976, p.70). It is arguable that, rather than empower, Doyle's works have exploited the plight of the underrepresented working class of Dublin, presenting them as comically feral, to entertain the middle class and gain commercial success. This commercialism is the essence of the neoloiberal capitalist agenda in Irelaand. The common sense nature of this embedded in Doyle's work. In opposition ot this is the work of Dermot Bolger, discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Poetics of scarcity: Dermot Bolger's tacit solidarity with poverty.

> Irish drama's claim to social significance rests on the pledge that in acts of theatre something more than box office is at stake. Theatre is part of a broader cultural conversation about who we are, how we are in the world, and who and how we would like to be.
>
> (Merriman, in Bolger, 2001, p.54)

In this chapter Dermot Bolger's play *One Last White Horse* (1991)is critically analysed and located in cultural discourse. The timeline of Bolger's work coincides with both Doyle and Mercier, and navigates the waters of Ireland prior to the late 20th century economic boom, during and after, the fall of the Celtic Tiger. As already noted by Kersti Tarien Powell these playwrights used the city, specifically the Northside, as the backdrop to their creative narratives. While the principal focus of academic discussion of Bolger's work has been on his canon of novels, this chapter, and indeed this thesis focuses exclusively on the dramatic narrative of some of Bolger's less discussed, in some cases obscure, play texts and the contrasting and empowering representation of Dublin Northsiders he offers. Bolger's work has been referred to as 'bleak' by many theatre critics and academics such as Fintan O'Toole, Michael Pierse, Declan Kiberd, Ulrike Paschal and Ferdia MacAnna. Commentators such as Kiberd and Paschal even suggest that the bleak image of Dublin presented by Bolger is unrecognisable as contemporary Dublin. This chapter explores in depth the seemingly bleakest of Bolger plays to offer a fresh perspective on the power of Bolger's dramaturgy, and how it explores the tumultuous experience of social, economic and culturally created scarcity on the Northside of Dublin. A critical analysis of *One Last White Horse* (1991) highlights a tacit solidarity with the process of how the working and lower

classes navigate an existence in conditions of economic and psychological scarcity. To do this, Charles Clark's theory of socially constructed scarcity in modern neoliberal economics will frame the climate of Bolger's work. Bolger's exploration of the effects of scarcity on the mind-set of those in poverty will then be explored using Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir's new scientific hypothesis on the psychological effects of scarcity in their text, *Scarcity: Why Having too Little Means so Much* (2014). This chapter endeavours to conclude that Bolger's perceived bleakness is actually the effect of a poetics of scarcity that portrays the complexity of a neoliberal agenda that ensnares the working and lower classes of Ireland in cycles of poverty. As Jerome Bruner described Aristotelian poetics as an attempt to capture life in action, this chapter explores the way Bolger's play *One Last White Horse* captures the character in the neoliberal system of socially generated scaricty and how the action of his life is affected by this. Exploration of this poetics of scarcity is a common trope in the work of Bolger. Michael Pierse, in his article 'My City's Million Voices Chiding Me: "Answerability" and Modern Irish Working-class Writers' (2013), describes Bolger as 'a writer impatient for political change.' (p.53) This was evident from the outset of Bolger's career as a playwright with his award-winning first play *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* (1989). *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* established Bolger's style as a playwright, with surreal stage settings and characters suspended in limbo. Giovanna Tallone, in her 2009 article, 'Rewriting the "caoineadh": Dermot Bolger's The Lament for Arthur Cleary', describes was she refers to as the 'fluidity' of Bolger's play. She asserts that 'the fluidity in structural organisation has a parallel in the multiplicity of roles each of the actors' (2009, p. 48). The play explores the homecoming of Arthur Cleary to Dublin that he expected to know but has changed beyond his recognition. Bolger portrays the death of Arthur Cleary and his life in surreal flashback as he meanders between countries, Ireland and Europe, and between worlds, life and death. In line with Brecht's assertion that reality can be present

in theatre in factual for fantastical form, Bolger uses fluid spaces to convey the shifting landscapes of lower and working class environs and the difficulty of the individual who is forced to navigate them. Ferdia MacAnna, in 1991, wrote that;

> During the 80s, the revival in Dublin writing was merely that a revival […] but as yet no major figure or major work or literary landmark or masterpiece stood out. Dublin was still in literary limbo. In 1989 however, Dermot Bolger's first play, 'The Lament for Arthur Cleary' received its premiere at the Project Arts Centre. Here, suddenly, was a work about modern Dublin which seemed real and relevant and resonated with truth and anger.
>
> (MacAnna, 1991, p.26)

Bolger's plot lines can sometimes seem over-ambitious in their bleak tone as his work recognises the importance of a multiplicity of voices, the intersectionality of people and how this intersectionality brings people together in space and time. His narratives then recognise, most importantly, how these meetings generate place. These interrelations, using the framework provided by Doreen Massey, are what generate identities and locate them in place. Massey explains that;

> So easily this way of imagining space can lead us to conceive of other places, people, cultures simply as phenomena 'on' the surface. It is not an innocent manoeuvre, for by this means they are deprived of histories. […] They lie there, in space, in place, without their own trajectories. […] What might it mean to reorientate this imagination, to question that habit of thinking of space as surface? If, instead, we conceive of a meeting-up of histories, what happens to our implicit imaginations of time and space?
>
> (2005, p.4)

This reorientation of imagination of space to conceive of a meeting up of histories is what Bolger captures in his writing. So often, poorer communities are seen as undeveloped rather than communities with what Massey describes as their own trajectories. His plays regularly revolve around the intersectionality of people. His stories serve as the axis, the meeting point where the characters' lives intersect but he also explores the rationale for why and how the characters have come together. Place plays a key role in his plays. For most of Bolger's plays the characters inhabit a place that is unstable, that they have little or no autonomy over, while the characters are suspended, at the mercy of social stratification as well as their own needs and urges.

Most of Bolger's work is set on the Northside of Dublin. It is focused on areas such as his native Finglas and the surrounding areas. As noted by Niamh Malone; 'In all of his work, Bolger gives significant weight to place, and the idea of place' (2011, p.245). In understanding the cultural, social and economic conditions of the Northside, the importance of place and how this is represented in Bolger's work is essential. Importantly, as pointed out by Malone, it is the weight Bolger gives to place as an idea, rather than a fixed entity, that is integral to his work. Bolger expertly fashions dramatic narratives that present Northside characters in process and the wider social, economic and cultural boundaries are vital to this. Bolger contends that in his approach to writing 'the politics and social issues are always secondary to me' (Shortt, 2006, p.473). What Bolger does is to present a meeting up of histories as described by Massey. He asserts that first he is a storyteller and that 'ultimately people and their stories are the focus and their existence is inextricably linked to political, social, economic circumstances' (Shortt, 2006, p.473). Place is linked with identity through the social economic and cultural experiences that intersect in space. Social scientist Paul Morgan further supports this as he suggests that 'the concept of place refers to the subjective experience of embodied human existence in the material world' (Morgan, 2010, p11). The material and social scarcity experienced on

the Northside of the city is a core concern of much of Bolger's work. As discussed in Chapter 1 the physical landscape of the Northside of Dublin has suffered the ignominy of being the playground for private interests under cover of public policy decisions. Bolger provides an essential perspective, both on the poetic representation of the Northside, and the journey and development this side of the city has experienced in contemporary history. He presents this history in the nuanced narratives of individual Northsiders where environment plays a key role in lives lived and his work explores the lived consequences of people for whom a limited horizon of choice has been set.

Michael Pierse contends that 'writing of working-class life or provenance, however fantastic or experimental, does tend to draw attention to social conditions', (2013, p.51) How writers draw this attention is important, as the narrative structure of working-class writing can either challenge or ratify social stratification. Declan Kiberd, in his widely celebrated and highly influential text *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation*, discredited the significance of the dramatic narratives of Bolger's writing in this regard. He claims that;

> [T]he writing of Bolger and his colleagues was considerably less subversive than it sometimes took itself to be. In its underlying sentimentality about its youthful subjects as victims of social tyranny, it grossly exaggerated the malevolence and the importance of priests, teachers, politicians. Although it prided itself on its realistic engagement with the sordid aspects of Dublin life, it may have unintentionally ratified the old pastoral notion of rural Ireland as real Ireland. The city, in Dermot Bolger's world, was not a place in which a happy, modern life was possible: it was not depicted as the vibrant zone of creativity which Dublin by then had become.
>
> (1996, p.609)

Kiberd is not alone in his critique of Bolger's work. Ulrike Paschel in her book *No Mean City? The Image of Dublin in the Novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle and Val Mulkerns* (1998) echoes this sentiment. She states that 'Bolger's Dublin is a hostile, violent, dangerous and corrupt place' (Paschel, 1998, p.62). Paschel describes the Dublin put forth by Bolger as 'unrecognisable' (1998, p.62). An interesting predicament arises when the question of from whose perspective this is Dublin unrecognisable is put. The critical judgments offered by Kiberd and Paschel are problematic as they essentially, in cultural terms, reify narratives that reinforce cultural and economic inequality. Their assumptions support a culture of what Charles Clark calls 'conspicuous consumption', and such intellectual support is a key feature in embedding the economic process of socially created scarcity. According to Clark this process communicates status through consumption and extends not only to goods but also services and culture. Clark explains that 'the conspicuous consumption of the leisure class plays an important role in the maintenance of the social order, for it sets the standards of honour and right behaviour for the rest of society to emulate' (Clark, 2002, p.418). In this regard, the cultural vibrancy of Dublin is the standard aspired to for status. Kiberd's description of a 'vibrant zone of creativity' at the beginning of the Celtic Tiger was not a zone that was, or is, accessible for vast amounts of people. Kieran Allen confronts this mentality as he explains that the Celtic Tiger, despite the popular narrative, did not 'lift all boats' (2000, p.1) and instead exaggerated already existing inequality in Ireland, therefore generating a rationale for social exclusion from the vibrant Dublin described by Kiberd. Bolger's work dissents from this conspicuous consumption process and interjects narratives that disrupt the status quo. As Pierse suggests 'much of Bolger's work is about such irruptions of unwanted tales [and to] provide a site of resistance to the "chav," "trash," and "knacker" stereotypes and distortions that so often characterize mass media depictions of modern working-class life.' (2013, p.54). As Massey contends this narrative

formation presents communities as underdeveloped on a scale that presents an ideal to be emulated rather than as communities with their own histories and nuances. This is that neoliberal status quo that the narrative structure of Bolger's work interrupts. Kieran Allen asserts that the poor are often spoken about in a largely generalized way (2000, p.35), Bolger refuses this and insists that the individual navigating poverty generated by economic and social scarcity is a human experience worth staging. As noted by Ferdia Mac Anna, 'Bolger […] saw Dublin not as some ancient colonial backwater full of larger than life "characters" boozing their heads off in stage-Irish pubs, but as a troubled modern entity, plagued by drugs, unemployment, high taxes, disillusionment and emigration' (1991, p.21). Bolger's shows Dublin as a city plagued by scarcity.

To fully articulate the scarcity explored in Bolger's play an economic perspective of socially generated scarcity, such as Clark's is required. Similarly, a new social 'science in the making' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.12) on the psychological effects of scarcity illuminates Bolger's poetics. The culmination of these theories challenges the narrative of conspicuous consumption in modern Ireland and the use of surface culture, described by Massey, to present an ideal narrative of developed society in contrast to underdeveloped society. The employment of this narrative structure is imperative to the implementation of neoliberal policies. In his 2017 TEDTalk 'Poverty isn't a lack of character; it's a lack of cash', Rutger Bregman asks 'Why do the poor make such poor decisions?'. He highlights how the move to neoliberal policies in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher included the perspective that poverty was a result of personality flaws in certain individuals. An interview with Richard Dowden in the *Catholic Herald* in 1978 supports this view, and Thatcher is recorded as saying;

> Nowadays there really is no primary poverty left in this country. In Western countries we are left with the problems which aren't poverty. All right, there may be poverty because people don't know how to budget, don't know how to spend their earnings, but now you are left with the really hard fundamental character—personality defect.
>
> (https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103793)

A fundamental feature of the culture surrounding neoliberal politics is the dominance of a perspective that people are ultimately responsible for their own fate, and this displaces responsibility for poverty from social, economic and governmental structures. This rhetoric legitimising the harsh circumstances of poorer classes is at the core of the neoliberal policies that socially orchestrate scarcity so as to produce wealth for an elite few in society and this rhetoric surrounding the poor classes legitimises this. Clark explains the process of this, he asserts that:

> In a modern capitalist economy, scarcity is socially created, in fact needs to be socially created in order to generate wealth and at the same time generate poverty. [...] Three economic processes are at the centre of the creation of wealth and poverty, and it is in these processes that we are to find the possibilities of lessening poverty in the rich as well as in the poor countries. These processes are (1) the social creation of scarcity, (2) social exclusion, and (3) the assignment and shifting of costs.
>
> (Clark, 2002, p.418)

In particular, the narrative of individual responsibility manipulates the narratives of lower classes and generates the second process that Clark describes, social exclusion. It is specifically this which Clark emphasises is essential for a capitalist economy to thrive at the expense of the most impoverished (2002, p.420). Social exclusion is crucial in generating both

wealth and poverty in modern capitalism. The crux of this, according to Clark, is the proprietary right of property. 'All wealth starts with the creation of private property. By definition, private property is social exclusion; it is the assignment of the rights of an object to a single unit or person at the expense of society as a whole' (Clark, 2002, p.420). The Surrender Grants offered in Ballymun, discussed in chapter 2, is one example of the obsession with private property in contemporary Ireland. This obsession generates chasms of inequality and is one way that scarcity is socially generated in Ireland. In the Irish context 'ideologies of neoliberalism have come to assume a 'common sense' status within the country's political class (Kitchen, et. al, 2012, p.1304). The neoliberal rhetoric of poverty presents a coherent argument that seems to make sense in neoclassical economic terms, which rationalises production and distribution. Clark defines this approach;

> Wealth ultimately springs from productivity and the reward for economic efforts (whether waiting or work), while poverty is explained due to the absence of productivity and the inability or unwillingness to work and wait. There should be no doubt that wealth and poverty can be generated by the same processes. The fallacy of the neoclassical approach lies in the assumption that the key determinant variables are individual characteristics and not social structures and institutions.
>
> (2002, p.417-418)

The difficulty is how to refute the embedded narrative of individual responsibility at the core of neoliberal narratives. How do you tackle the neoliberal perspective, immortalised by Thatcher, that the poor are simply bad at managing their own budgets when it is presented a rational 'common sense'? Bregman emphasises that the facts are clear, statistically, poorer people make poorer choices when it comes to food, health, wellbeing and finances (Bregman, 2014, p.55). These cold facts would suggest that the neoliberal position in

correct, poverty is indeed based on a lack of character, however, new science suggests that 'the feeling of scarcity is distinct from its physical reality' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.11). This has much wider implications for cultures that suffer scarcity as a constant.

In their book *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means so Much* (2014), psychologists Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir argue that it is not a personality defect that causes impoverished people to make poor choices, but, in fact, it is the circumstances that would make most people in the same situation make poor choices. Mullainathan and Shafir assert that 'scarcity is a broad concept' (2014, p.3). They define scarcity as the perception of having less than you need, be this money, time, companionship etc. This means that for people who suffer poverty there is a double-edged sword of the practical elements of not having enough and the further difficulty of perceptions of what is needed. Mullainathan and Shafir clarify this;

> Where does the feeling of scarcity come from? Physical limits, of course, play a role – the money in our savings account, the debts we owe, the tasks we must complete. But so does our subjective perception of what matters […] Such desires are shaped by culture, upbringing and even genetics.
>
> (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.11)

The conundrum lies in the seemingly rational argument put forth by scarcity economics and the irrational effects that scarcity has on the mind. Added to this is pressure from lack of tangible resources in the context of powerful, idealised cultural representations of what a person should have access to. Scarcity is an imposed condition which alters how we process information and then in turn how a situation is dealt with. Mullainathan and Shafir suggests that research shows that scarcity arrests a person's sentience and consumes them. '[W]hen we experience scarcity of any kind, we become absorbed by it. The mind orients

automatically, powerfully, towards unfulfilled needs. […] It imposes itself on our minds' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.7). This absorption of scarcity in the mind happens unconsciously, whether we want it or not, and effects the way we deal with problems. It is an irrational response to need in the short term, and generates narrow focus at the expense of long-term planning. 'People experiencing scarcity often become more focused on pressing needs' (Shah, Mullainathan, Shafir, 2018, p.1). Bregman insists that people who suffer from scarcity become adept at managing short term goals (2014, p.56). While in some isolated cases this focus can produce positive results there is no immediate escape from poverty so the effects of scarcity are continual, consuming and this has consequences for cognitive function. The physical and cultural scarcity experienced by the poorest in a society alters ability and capacity, what Mullainathan and Shafir refer to as 'mental bandwidth' (2014, p.54). They state that;

> Scarcity reduces all these components of bandwidth – it makes us less insightful, less forward thinking, less controlled […] Being poor, for example, reduces a person's cognitive capacity more than going one full night without sleep. It is not that the poor have less bandwidth as individuals. Rather, it is that the experience of poverty reduces anyone's bandwidth.
>
> (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014. p.13)

A combination of impoverished resources, perceptions of cultural scarcity and the disabling tax on cognitive capacity all work against poorer communities to ensnare them in poverty. This is a defining feature of how socially generated scarcity operates in the neoliberal model and exacerbates social exclusion. Under this model as the wealth of a country grows for the elites and upper classes, they consume higher amounts which is presented as a common-sense ideal for the lower classes to aspire to. The consumption pattern of the upper classes excludes and diverts the attention of the lower classes.

> The emulation of the consumption patterns of the leisure class by the lower class ensures the acquiescence of the lower classes, for it is their buying into (pun intended) the legitimacy of the social order, thus distracting them from questioning it.
>
> (Clark, 2002, p.418)

This perspective problematizes the critique of Bolger's work as merely a bleak, unrecognisable depiction of Dublin that ignored Dublin's Celtic Tiger vibrancy and suggests this critique supports the neoliberal model of social exclusion. Bolger instead destabilises the neoliberal narrative of character and lack and explores the poetics of lives living with scarcity.

One Last White Horse epitomises neoliberal scarcity models and the resulting psychological difficulty scarcity imposes. It was performed on the Peacock stage in 1991 following a commission by the Abbey Theatre. Despite stellar reviews at the time, it remains one of the least academically discussed plays in Bolger's cannon. Clips from reviews of the play, in Bolger's 1992 publication of the play script, notes that the *Financial Times* review read;

> One does not expect to be entranced and uplifted by a play about a homicidal crack addict whose beloved elder brother dies of AIDS, but I was. I found it worked superbly.
>
> (Bolger, p.144)

This play, however, encapsulates more than just the heroin epidemic that plagued Dublin in the 1990s. Bolger's play captures the dyadic nature of wealth and poverty in a neoliberal economic culture, in which 'wealth and poverty are not seen as two evils but as different sides to the same evil, for the wealth of the rich man is the cause of the poverty of the poor' (Clark, 2002, p.415). With the benefits of hindsight, and in light of advances in social science research, there is arguably a case that Bolger's degraded dramatic world embodies the neoliberal

social creation of scarcity for the many to generate wealth for the few, as well as the physiological pressures of this generated scarcity and how it 'captures' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014) the mind. *One Last White Horse* explores not only the physical reality of scarcity but also how cultures are influenced and shaped by the psychology of this scarcity. Bolger crafts a dramatic narrative that explores both the explicit and implicit effects of scarcity, and his characters embody Clark's assertion that 'wealth can cause poverty' (2002, p.417). In *One Last White Horse* we see how the flow of wealth away from the poor while simultaneously building the aspiration of wealth manifests in the cruel reality of physical and psychological scarcity. The character narrative is the primary focus and the socio-economics secondary, just as previously quoted from Bolger. In *One Last White Horse* the initial focus is the play's protagonist, Eddie, and his internal struggle with the scarcity he endures in his life. From this then the secondary elements of how Eddie's wider environment creates this scarcity is presented. There is a cyclical nature of how the individual affects his environment and how the environment affects the individual. In the play Eddie is haunted by the allegorical character of the Horse in a limbo-like setting '*where the sole logic is the logic of the dreamer'* (Bolger, 1992, p.147). The dream-like quality of the play makes it an irrational space attempting to make sense of the rational events in the life of Eddie. In this way it emulates the complexity of socially generated scarcity, and reveals the clash of a rational economic argument and the irrational effects of scarcity on the most vulnerable. The allegory of the horse could be perceived as death, or heroin but in this context the Horse may be understood as representing scarcity itself, the conscious, rational narrative and the unconscious irrational responses. The Horse presents Eddie's life in flashback and forces him to relive some of the most difficult times with his Mother, Father, Brother, Girlfriend and Daughter. The phantasmagorical nature of the scenes creates '*the surreal, nightmarish quality of the play'* (Bolger, 1992, p.147). The Horse conducts Eddie through

this and apprehends him as he tries to move through his life. Mullainathan and Shafir assert that 'scarcity operates unconsciously. […] It captures our attention whether we like it or not' (2014, p.9). In the play we see The Horse capture Eddie this way and reduce his focus on the struggles of his life.

One pivotal scene in the play is a flashback to Eddie's childhood which demonstrates the impact of living as a poor person in a culture of conspicuous economic consumption, as described by Clarke, and also dramatizes Mullainathan and Shafir's assertion that 'scarcity captures the mind' (2014, p.7). In the scene Eddie craves lemonade, which his family cannot afford, but his mother plays a trick on him with a glass that appears to be bubbling with lemonade:

> EDDIE: (*A note of bitterness)* You promised. Always teasing me, making up yarns. Remember that hottest and final day of autumn, clothes sticking to my back as I walked home to you, all the way up the steep hill from the Botanic Gardens. The glass of sparkling lemonade you had waiting for me on the window sill in the kitchen.
>
> (*The* HORSE *holds an imaginary glass out*)
>
> HORSE: I've been saving for you all day, son, I knew how thirsty you would be.
>
> (EDDIE *accepts the glass from her. He cups it in his hands and throws his head right back, raising his hands to his lips and almost gagging with the strain of trying to swallow*)
>
> EDDIE: Sweet Christ Mammy, the light is flowing through it like it were champagne. The longing is so much I can almost taste the bubbles bursting on my tongue. Why am I still aching for lemonade?
>
> (*The* HORSE *reaches her own hands out to lower his and smiles*)
>
> HORSE: Can you not see it's a trick glass, son? Young Sheila Murphy brought it in from next door. Look at the sheet of glass inside the glass itself, isn't it clever?

(EDDIE *grimaces and makes a noise as if about to burst into tears*)

HORSE: (*Surprised by his outburst but trying to soothe him*) You know we can't afford lemonade, son. I'll get you some nice cool water from the tap.

(*She backs away from him.*)

EDDIE: Why did it upset me so much, crying in that small kitchen, feeling so lost and betrayed? Even when you found the money to send Brendan for lemonade why did it not taste the same? I guzzled the whole bottle down, never lifting the glass from my teeth. But why was it like an ache inside that could never be filled … like a trust broken … like I could never be certain of anything again? Why?

(Bolger, 1992, p.154-155)

The scarcity experienced by Eddie in this scene is akin to a trauma and alters his world view. This is demonstrated when Eddie explains that the initial feeling of not having the lemonade broke his trust and nothing could ever be the same, even after he did actually receive lemonade the ache of the scarcity stayed with him. This is indicative of Mullainathan and Shafir's point that when people are captured by scarcity 'the capture of attention can alter experience' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.9). The aspiration of the lemonade and the scarcity of the lemonade, with the resulting injustice Eddie feels by this, serves as a motif for the play and highlights Eddie's class status in an economic structure of artificially created scarcity. Bolger shows how these struggles of scarcity from the formative years can follow throughout life and haunt the future. The struggle experienced by Eddie with the lemonade when he is young follows him and the scene is repeated through his life as the Horse draws Eddie back to this struggle.

HORSE'S VOICE: […] I've been saving it for you all day son, I knew how thirsty you would be. Lemonade! See how the light flows through it like it were champagne. The longing inside you is so much you can

> almost taste the bubbles bursting on your tongue. Throw your head back, son, throw it back. […] EDDIE *is almost gagging with the strain of trying to swallow* […]
>
> Can you not see, son? It's a trick glass, a trick.

(Bolger, 1992, p.148)

In the repetition of the scene there is an interesting emphasis on a 'trick' being played on Eddie. The Horse gives a prominence to the word 'trick' which I argue is synonymous with the scarcity Eddie suffers in his life being synthetic. Eddie is a character that completely buys in, as noted by Clark, to the neoliberal model. Eddie toils and suffers trying to establish his willingness to work hard and also to wait, a survival mechanism described by Clark. He is a loyal employee and believes fervently that his loyalty will pay off, and he will be lifted out of his environment of scarcity. He also completely buys into a more general Irish obsession with private property and home ownership is his goal. The immense pressure he puts on himself is to meet this end:

> EDDIE: I have a job in O'Rourke's hardware shop, it's not much but it's steady.
>
> BRENDAN: Come on, kiddo. O'Rourke's. I don't want to be cruel but … that cute old fox, Mrs O'Rourke. Oh, you'd swear you were her son the way she speaks about you, and you'd certainly swear she was leaving you the shop the way you slave for her but cop yourself on.
>
> Eddie: She says she'll give me a letter for the bank. I've been looking at this small estate of town houses out beyond Clondalkin. I figure maybe I could get together a deposit for one.

(Bolger, 1992, p.160-161)

Despite his commitment to his job Eddie is left bereft when the owner, Mrs O'Rourke, passes away and under questionable circumstances her assets are passed to her self-serving son, Smiler:

> SMILER: The company's gone into receivership, Eddie, but we'll not see you stuck. You stay on for the closing down sale, everything to clear, and I'll look after you with a bit of overtime. Get you a start, you know. And I'll tell you what *(laughs)*, myself and yourself now we'll write you a reference between us that will take the sight out of your eye. I'll sign it in her name for you, sure I could do a signature of hers that would pass on her last will and testament.
>
> *(He stops and looks around him as though he has just realized what he has said, then looks back at EDDIE and smiles as he moves towards the doorway)*

(Bolger, 1992, p.162-163)

This injustice Eddie suffers catapults him further to a life of scarcity despite his loyal commitment and hard labour. The exacerbation of social exclusion during a prolonged period of growing prosperity in contemporary Ireland focused on the marginalized and the excluded themselves, 'but there is little discussion on who is doing the marginalising' (Kieran Allen, 2000, p.37). What Bolger conveys in this scene is how the labour and commitment of the working class is betrayed for individual greed. This philosophy of gaining personal wealth at the expense of the most economically vulnerable is a key feature of neoliberal culture. Clark emphasises that 'the inability of economic growth to solve the problem of poverty is linked to the fact that much of the growth in wealth is at the expense of the poor' (Clark. 2002, p.421). The difficulty in addressing these issues begin at source with the point made by Rob Kitchin, Cian O'Callaghan, Mark Boyle, Justin Gleeson, and Karen Keaveney (2012), 'Placing neoliberalism: the rise and fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger'. They assert that even after the 2008 financial crash, which in their opinion hit Ireland more strongly than the other developed countries that were affected, there was a reluctance to attribute neoliberal structures to Irish politics. In their view there is a 'failure to apprehend the Irish state as a neoliberal state' (Kitchin et al., 2012, p.1303).

Even two decades after Bolger's play and now almost ten years after the fall of the Celtic Tiger with the financial crash there is a reluctance to attribute the specific terms of neoliberalism to Irish politics. This makes it difficult to address the point made by Allen that there is little discussion of who exactly is doing the excluding.

This reluctance to focus on who causes this social exclusion play into the vagueness of the term in the first place. Allen tells us that, 'The term social exclusion also contains an important ambiguity at its very core. It can imply that the structures of society exclude the poor or that the poor themselves hold particular values which lead to their marginalisation' (2000, p.37). If there is a reluctance to focus on the people and the structures that lead to social exclusion the focus, then, is placed on the poor themselves. There is a viciousness to this narrative that causes the poor to even turn on themselves and this is what Bolger captures with Eddie. Eddie continues to pursue impossible personal goals in an economic environment stacked against him, and he strives to be different from his world around him. He completely buys into the notion that if only he works hard he will eventually be rewarded. We see further proof of this when he takes the job as a 'gochie', which is a term colloquial to Dublin that roughly translates into security person:

> BRENDAN: (Amused) Is this where they have you now, brother?
>
> EDDIE: (Defensively) It's a job
>
> BRENDAN: Jaysus, a gochie in a hut. Are you keeping the punters out of the supermarket or holding them in?
>
> […]
>
> EDDIE: It brings in more than the assistance. Three years of my life working in that shop, whatever hours under the sun and moon she asked me. They told me in the labour exchange. She never paid a penny of my PRSI or PAYE these last eighteen months.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.163-164)

Eddie embodies the neoliberal attitude of personal responsibility for failure which is internalised by poor people, and admonishes his sister-in-law who is a poor drug addict. He maintains a self-righteousness that once he is working and not receiving welfare benefit that he is still in with a chance to work his way through his life of scarcity. This we see when he says to his brother that 'it brings in more than the assistance'. Yet despite Eddie's total commitment to the neoliberal structure of 'work and wait' he falls victim to market forces again;

> EILEEN: What's happened, Eddie? Why are you here?
> (*EDDIE is silent for a moment, clenching and unclenching his fist*.)
> EDDIE: A pound deposit
> EILEEN: What?
> EDDIE: Per trolley. A schoolboy gives you a little ticket on the way in and a refund on the way out. The marketing people were over from London. They're worried about the image. A tin hut at the gate doesn't look smart enough.
> EILEEN: They don't need you anymore?
> EDDIE: (*Bitterly*) They gave me a full day's pay for today.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.168)

Eddie's life declines rapidly following this and Bolger coveys how precarious lives suffering scarcity are. How one small shift can create a huge chasm. Mullainathan and Shafir assert that there is an inevitably that 'scarcity leads to dissatisfaction and struggle' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.12). We see this dissatisfaction and struggle starkly in the lifetime of Eddie and the steadily increasing pressure that scarcity brings with it. As Eddie falls deeper and deeper into poverty the effects echo the theories of Mullainathan and Shafir. They conclude that, 'poverty is surely the most widespread and important example of scarcity. One cannot take a vacation from poverty. Simply deciding not to be poor – even for a bit – is never an option' (2014, p.147-148). As the momentum

of the play progresses the psychological difficulties physical scarcity cause become stark.

> EILEEN: I've nothing dry to put on, unless we wrap her in one of your old shirts. I wasn't expecting it. She's been going through clothes all evening, even things she's long outgrown. It takes so long to wash them by hand.
>
> EDDIE: (*Snaps*) Stop getting at me. Stop getting at me. If I could get you a washing machine I would!
>
> EILEEN: (*Snaps back)* Who's getting at you? Who's asking you for one? Will you just go up and hold the child while I find something. She's whimpering up there, I'm sure she has that temperature back.
>
> EDDIE: A doctor, she must have a doctor.
>
> EILEEN: You think he'd come out here at this hour on a medical card? I'll take her down the clinic in the morning. We'll sponge her down again.
>
> EDDIE: Will she take nothing?
>
> EILEEN: What is there to take? Hot milk and honey might make her sleep if we had honey. I suppose we could ask Carol next door again…
>
> EDDIE: No.
>
> EILEEN: Maybe…
>
> EDDIE: (*Shouts*) No more maybes! I'm sick to death of maybes!
>
> EILEEN: Eddie, will you calm down. Go up there, she's crying. (*As* EDDIE *goes to the ramp the* HORSE *confronts him. He stops. The* OLD MAN *has appeared at the top of the ramp*.)
>
> EDDIE: I can't
>
> EILEEN: What?
>
> EDDIE: I can't face her. I'm ashamed, Eileen. It's my fault, no matter what you say, it's mine.

(Bolger, 1992, p.170 -p.171)

It is at this point we start to see how dominating scarcity is and how it imposes wholly on those who suffer it. As Mullainathan and Shafir conclude; 'Scarcity forces all the choices' (2014, p.19). Eddie is continually worn down by this despite all his efforts to remain economically active. It belies the neoliberal position that all it takes to succeed is a commitment to work. This lived reality of the most socially excluded and the difficulties suffered because of scarcity problematizes the neoliberal model. In Eddie's case he is completely captured by his scarcity and his morale is diminished. Bolger's poetics communicates this despair and challenges the ambiguity of social exclusion and individual responsibility. He conveys through Eddie the psychological turmoil this intense scarcity causes and how this weakens Eddie's resolve. Kieran Allen points out that for the socially and economically excluded in Ireland the 'constant poverty can often lead to a feeling of resignation and despair' (2002, p.34). Bolger highlights this point through Eddie;

> EDDIE: I'm sick of scraping around for something. You get tired of looking for the perfect job, the perfect anything. You lose hope, you lose the will to get up and look for something, to skimp the bus fare to the interview, to find the nerve to face the row of suits quizzing you about your last employment, to feel guilt in your stomach no matter how hard you looked for work. So you just stay at home brooding, putting off getting up because you're in terror of the slitted brown envelopes waiting to trap you in the hall.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.164)

When Eddie's brother dies his scarce circumstances merge with his grief and this powerful force causes Eddie to seek an escape from his situation and he turns to heroin. The guilt, grief and feeling of personal failure Eddie endures is all consuming. The Horse embodies the heroin in the play and calls to Eddie to offer escape;

> Horse: Your soul was crying out for me in anguish, your need aching to be filled.
> EDDIE: I was half crazed with grief at my brother's death.
> HORSE: You were praying for anything that would halt the thoughts in your head.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.186)

Looking at this through a neoliberal lens the rational argument would be that Eddie made this personal choice and that this is a weakness of his character. However further probing the hypothesis of the psychology of scarcity we can argue that the continued orchestrated scarcity suffered by Eddie significantly reduced his ability to withstand the seduction of the mental release that heroin offered. 'When you can afford so little, so many more things need to be resisted, and your self-control ends up being run down' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.158). Throughout the play we see how this scarcity is all encompassing and effects every aspect of Eddie's life. It is a harsh reality when his wife Eileen exclaims that she had admired Eddie's 'patience when we had no money to buy condoms' (Bolger, 1992, P.193). Just like Mullainathan and Shafir contend, scarcity is insidious and infiltrates even the most intimate moments of a person's life. The constant strain of scarcity significantly reduces a person's capacity, or what Mullainathan and Shafir refer to as 'mental bandwidth'. They are confident that 'poverty at its very core taxes bandwidth and diminishes capacity' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.160). In this instance the neoliberal framework of personal responsibility is challenged as poor people are not operating at the same capacity. At Rutger Bergman explains; 'they are not making dumb decisions because they are dumb, but because they're living in a context in which anyone would make dumb decisions' (Bregman, 2014, p.57). It is the taxation of bandwidth that is most important when attempting to coherently challenge neoliberal ideologies.

Mental bandwidth either promotes or impedes cognitive function and this has a detrimental effect on people suffering poverty:

> Bandwidth underpins nearly every aspect of our behaviour. We use it to calculate our odds of winning in poker, to judge other people's facial expressions, to control our emotions, to resist our impulses, to read a book, or to think creatively. Nearly every advanced cognitive function relies on bandwidth. Yet a tax on bandwidth is easy to overlook.
>
> (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.160)

The ease at which mental bandwidth can be overlooked is favourable to neoliberal ideology. Allen addressed this in the Irish context as he explains that dominant ideologies have a comprehensive ability to mask anything that might seem conflicting by 'presenting their outlook as the most practical' (2000, p.35). This echoes the sentiment of Clark that in socially constructed scarcity the 'rational' economic model is emphasised as common sense. By this method there is also the ability to secure the complicity of those the systems work against. Bolger conveys this in the complexity of the scenes between Eddie and the Old Man. Eddie breaks into the Old Man's house twice in the play. The first time it is for money for his sick child. The second time it is for money for his heroin addiction. Both times, the Old Man assumes the same of Eddie's character;

> OLD MAN: (*Contemptuous)* Rooting among the leftovers of people's lives for 'something to sell for money', eh. For what? For drugs, is it huh So you can hang around crazed out of your head on some street corner.
> EDDIE: For a sick child.

> OLD MAN: (*Snorts)* A sick child! You have to hide behind a child to justify yourself. I don't believe you, boy. (*He spits*) Now go to hell for your money.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.173)

Bolger juxtaposes the two instances where Eddie burgles the Old Man which creates a unique sympathy with the character. If Eddie had been seen merely committing burglary for drugs, then it would be more difficult to sympathise with the character. The whole picture of Eddie's struggles through a life of scarcity build to the final burglary and with a fuller picture there is an opportunity to sympathise with him where there may not have been. As we have seen Eddie's mental bandwidth be taxed throughout the play it is easier to understand how he has got to where he is. The mental bandwidth is not so easily overlooked from the audience perspective. This generates a tacit solidarity for how a person comes to commit a heinous act when under immense pressure. It is a direct subversion of the neoliberal narrative of the poor. It shows how 'scarcity creates its own trap' (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2014, p.13). But what Bolger also does in the construction of the Old Man's response to Eddie is demonstrate how complicity from those affected by neoliberal ideology reinforces the very ideology that artificially generates the scarcity they endure. The Old Man assumes the simplistic logic that Eddie has made a rational choice to commit burglary. Bolger directly challenges this logic;

> EDDIE: (*Sneering*) 'I built this, I built that.' I hate you. I don't want your money. (*Sudden strength in his voice*) Fuck your money! I want your life. (*He holds his hand out*.) I want to have built things . . . I want to have come home, the good smell of sweat, mortar underneath my nails, dust on my clothes. I want to put money on the table, I want children to look at me with respect. I want … I want … I want to hold my head up in the

> supermarket, to walk with a full trolley and not look at the price of things, to see butts on the street and not want to pick them up. I want to have been you, you bastard. (*He pauses, trying to recover his jumbled thoughts*) I could kill you with envy, I could spit on you the way your eyes spit on me. Come back to life at thirty and I could beat you at anything. Why should the likes of you have had a life and not me?
> OLD MAN: I had my poor days too. De Valera's bloody economic war, recessions, hungry children at the window waiting for me to come in with bread in my pockets. But I never broke into people's houses in the middle of the night. When I fell down I got up again and kept my dignity.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.199-2000)

Bolger further emphasises the insidiousness of neoliberal structures as Eddie himself is unable to see that the system is set against him. Even despite the system chewing Eddie up and spitting him out he holds tightly to the notion that if he only worked harder things would have been better. He keeps the responsibility firmly at his own door and blames himself for succumbing to the stress and attempting to escape the pressure of his circumstances through drug addiction.

> EDDIE: I was still young. I could have found work … hope …
> HORSE: You met the ghost of yourself at every age to come, different shades of grey shuffling in and out of the labour exchange.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p. 187)

Eddie clings to the aspiration of the leisure class, it becomes so inextricably ingrained in his psyche that he equates this thinking with what is the ideal way of life. When looking back over his life and his constant attempt to 'work and wait' he remarks that he always 'tried to do what was right' (Bolger, 1992,

p.187). He dreams of a carefree existence of strolling through supermarkets and consuming nice goods. This is what Eddie equates with a respectable life. Despite the turmoil Eddie endures in a climate of socially generated scarcity his imagination is still caught in the aspirational force of neoliberalism. The Horse, speaking as heroin, accentuates this when he says 'I have stilled your body, but even I may not control your dreams' (Bolger, 1992, p.150). Despite the physical struggles imposed on Eddie through artificially constructed scarcity he still 'buys into' the neoliberal model. Bolger emphasises not only the physical prison imposed by scarcity but also the psychological prison it imposes. Eddie will never be free.

An important point to return to is that Bolger explores these constructs on the North side of the city. This is poignant as Kitchin et al. assert 'that neoliberalism produces its own geographies' (2012, p.1322). The promotional strategies of a public-private agenda of development of the Northside highlight this and obscure the socially generated scarcity of the Northside. The poetics of *One Last White Horse* reveal this structural paradigm, and problematise a critique of Bolger's work as a representation of an unrecognisable Dublin, dismissive of the city's 'vibrancy'. The uncomfortable result of that exposure is that this critique enables a neoliberal framework of social exclusion within socially generated scarcity. As interpreted here, *One Last White Horse* augments Kieran Allen's contention that; 'the Irish boom has produced a powerful sense of unease. The unease is at its sharpest when the two sides of Ireland are located side by side' (Allen, 2000, p.34). As Charles Clark points out, a function of neoliberal culture is that it absolves societal structures and hierarchies of any responsibility for the creation of poverty while also only charging them minimally with its assuagement (Clark, 2002, p.417). Bolger's tacit solidarity subverts, exposes, and addresses logical and moral flaws in the neoliberal narrative. The poetics, not only of *One Last White Horse*, but of all Bolger's plays tackles this socially generated narrative in some way. All of

Bolger's plays utilise the surreal limbo space to explore the wider structures of society and the characters struggle with a scarcity of some sort. In *The Passion of Jerome* (1999) ,set in a nightmarish version of a Ballymun flat, the juxtaposition of the middle and lower classes are explored as the ghost of a young boy haunts a successful business man engaging in an extra marital affair. *In High Germany* (1990) echoes the immigrant themes of *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*. One actor plays three Irish friends who now only meet for football matches then leave for different parts of the world as they are economically pushed to different parts of the world. The play is set in a railway station as the friends part ways, the limboesque setting of Bolger's plays is further emphasised in the 2010 sequel, *The Parting Glass,* as the much older friends now part ways through airports. *The Holy Ground,* which was produced in 1990 alongside *In High Germany* as a double bill known as *The Tramway End,* is told as a retrospective narrative by the character Monica as she returns home from her husband's funeral. She recounts the scarcity in their marriage and her ability to regain control after years of scare agency. Bolger's later plays such as *Walking the Road* (2007) and *Tea Chests and Dreams* (2012) move away from the Northside of Dublin but still the characters are found in a place of limbo navigating the scarcity of their situation. Interestingly, Bolger's earlier work was located in the heart of the city centre in the like of The Project Arts Centre, an off Broadway style theatre on the Southside of the city and also in Ireland's National theatre The Abbey Theatre and their smaller venue The Peacock. As his career progressed, however, Bolger moved his work further to the margins of the city with the commission of *The Ballymun Trilogy* produced with the axis Arts and Community resource centre in Ballymun as well as *Walking the Road, The Parting Glass* and *Tea Chests and Dreams*. While he still is commissioned by the Abbey Theatre, for example the recent *Last Orders at the Dockside* (2019), Bolger's work has become more accessible to the margins of the city despite his growing success. As Bolger said himself the

social and political is secondary to him, but by focusing on the narratives of Northside people and exposing the wider structures they attempt to navigate he inevitably explores the neoliberal geography of Dublin. In doing this, he refuses to make poor individuals the focus, concentrating instead on challenging the power structures which construct this geography so as to empower its human victims.

For this reason, Bolger's work differs radically from that of the other writers with whom he was grouped by Kersti Tarien Powell in a 'school' of 'Northside Realism'. What emerged in *One Last White Horse* was to achieve a much more developed form, and a much stronger impact, in *The Ballymun Trilogy*.

Chapter 6

Voicing voicelessness: Explorations of Northside Dublin Through Narratives that Empower and Narratives that Oppress

Not as a Foreign Tourist Does

Then I wondered, how does a place become
A reflection of its image in myth,
Or an adjective of speech?
And is a thing's image stronger
Than the thing itself?
If it weren't for my imagination
My other self would have told me,
"You are not here!"

Mahmoud Darwish (2003)

> Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our condition human.
>
> (Kearney, 2002, p.3)

In this chapter the trilogies produced by Dermot Bolger and Roddy Doyle are juxtaposed, revealing a stark variation of representations of Northside Dublin, particularly in relation to working class and lower-class communities from this area. These trilogies provide a unique insight into contrasting attitudes constructed of Northside Dubliners and chart the development of the Northside working class in Dublin through the sharp rise and fall of Celtic Tiger Ireland. The analysis begins with the narrative fiction and subsequent screenplays of Doyle's *Barrytown Trilogy (The Commitments* (1990), *The Snapper* (1991), *The*

Van (1992)) whose timeline coincides with the early years of Ireland's economic boom. Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy* (*From These Green Heights* (2004), *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006), *The Consequences of Lightning* (2008)) comments on the circumstances of one of Ireland's most ambitious urban regeneration projects during the height of the boom (2002-2006) and the subsequent economic and social collapse (2008-2009). The juxtaposition of these trilogies generates a diptych which offers a bifurcation of representations of the Northside. In her influential text, *Irish Fiction: An Introduction*, Kersti Tarien Powell refers to a genre of Irish plays as part of a 'Northside Realism' movement of 80s and 90s Dublin, which was, in her opinion, spearheaded by two playwrights; Dermot Bolger and Roddy Doyle. According to Powell, this genre emerged as a response to 'changes in society and in urban living experience [which] demanded a new and different kind of representation of Dublin' (Powell, 2004, p121).

Powell heralded Bolger and Doyle as the epitome of Northside Realism, a school which emerged from the host of new Irish urban writing described by Ferdia MacAnna as the Dublin Renaissance (1991). Contrasting representations of themes such as gender, class, displacement, unemployment and immigration are common to each of these trilogies, and they generate contrasting, and even conflicting images of contemporary working-class Dublin experience. Using Michael Pierse's trinity of 'power, sex and class' (2010, p. 88), which he attributes to Fintan O'Toole, this chapter explores the class interstices in Bolger and Doyle's trilogies that represent the Northside. While taking care to avoid endorsing an allegorical binary of 'good' and 'bad' representations, this chapter will seek to name and elucidate a range of narratives of oppression and narratives of empowerment which emphasize Irish culture's tendency to generate a social stratification of 'losers and winners' (O'Toole, 2003, p.3). Power will be explored, in relation to the use of narratives in constructing identity, by employing a theoretical framework drawn from Paul Ricoeur and

Richard Kearney. This will be further explored through John Kenneth Galbraith's notion of a functional underclass. Stark variation across representations of sex, female and male sexuality, and their relation to narratives of oppression and empowerment is explored. Finally, a conceptualisation of space offered by Doreen Massey in her seminal text *For Space* (2005) is utilised to explicate the idiosyncrasies of representations of class that result in what Massey refers to as 'negative difference [or] positive heterogeneity' (2005, p.13). The result of this will be a diptych of representations of the working class in Dublin, I would argue, that make it impossible for Bolger and Doyle to belong to the same school of Northside Realism which is suggested by Powell, unless they are polarities representing either end of a spectrum.

The dominant criticism of the literary works of Doyle and Bolger operates around an implied dichotomy between the two playwrights and the representations which they have created. Critical texts focused on Doyle's work include *Roddy Doyle: Raining on the Parade* (2003) by Dermot McCarthy and *Reading Roddy Doyle* (2001) by Caramine White, who introduces Doyle as 'one of the brightest stars on the Irish literary scene' (2001, p.1). Doyle is praised in McCarthy's book as the 'contemporary writer most associated with the "new Ireland"' (McCarthy, 2003, p.2). Lengthy analyses of Bolger's work on the other hand are difficult to come by. There are many articles and PhD studies exploring his work, but no study exists exploring cultural criticism of his canon in a way similar to the approaches taken to Doyle. Criticism that champions Doyle's writing as a brave new representation of urban Dublin culture is common and in opposition to this, similar criticism generally presents Bolger's work on the other hand, as dark and bleak. One stark example of this is Declan Kiberd's seminal text on Irish literature *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1996). This influential work draws parallels between Doyle

and Bolger and provides a key perspective of the work contested in Chapter 5, and that this chapter will challenge directly. During the time in which Kiberd formulated his criticism the Celtic Tiger was growing in strength and momentum in Ireland. Kiberd presented the work of Bolger with a certain resentment for what he claimed was an ignorance to the pulsating culture of growth in Dublin at the time and for choosing instead to paint a darker picture of Dublin;

> Although it prided itself on its realistic engagement with the sordid aspects of Dublin life, it may have unintentionally ratified the old pastoral notion of rural Ireland as real Ireland. The city, in Dermot Bolger's world, was not a place in which a happy, modern life was possible; it was not depicted as the vibrant zone of creativity which Dublin had become.
>
> (Kiberd, 1995, p.609)

While it is fair to argue that pockets of Irish society were indeed revelling in a rising economic tide that created such vibrant activity, Kieran Allen contends that contrary to the promises of the boom, the Celtic Tiger did not 'lift all boats' (Allen, 2000, p.3). Dublin had indeed changed, and new opportunities did create a 'vibrant zone of creativity' for some, but not all. Allen asserts that 'The sustained boom that became known as the Celtic Tiger […] transformed Ireland' (Allen, 2000, p.2). This transformation however was an exclusive endeavour and was not, as Kiberd would suggest, open to all, and for some 'happy, modern life' was, in fact, not possible. The Celtic Tiger raised expectations, it raised Ireland's international profile and it generated staggering levels of inequality. Allen contends that the Celtic Tiger boom 'produced considerable unease. Many complain that only the wealthy have gained. A greater sense of relative deprivation seems to have emerged in response to the more conspicuous consumption of wealth in some quarters' (Allen, 1999, p.32).

Kiberd's criticism of Bolger's work overlooks this and becomes part of that Celtic Tiger culture of discontent described by Allen where the wealthy gain and the rest must take places in a line, waiting for their turn to prosper. A distinctive point made by Allen in relation to the culture produced during the boom years is that; 'Despite the talk of community, all manner of polite signals were used to indicate that people should know their place' (Allen, 2000, p.1). There is a further irony to Kiberd's criticism of Bolger's work, in that he accuses Bolger of being a dominant voice resistant to multiplicity, yet in this Kiberd overlooks the platform that his work has given to hidden, or indeed overlooked, voices of the casualties of the Celtic Tiger economy. Instead Kiberd accuses Bolger's work of an obstinate, self-serving attempt to redefine the Irish condition, asserting that, 'in his texts, he found it difficult to register a variety of voices, and this was symptomatic of a generation which, in its anxiety to redefine the Irish condition, sometimes seemed unwilling to allow any voices other than its own to be heard' (Kiberd, 1995, p.610). This seems to be an example of Allen's notion of polite signals that socially stratified booming Ireland revealing a class bias in Kiberd's criticism. Criticism of Bolger depicting city life as bleak is not exclusive to Kiberd. In 1991 Mac Anna also contended that Bolger;

> saw Dublin not as some ancient colonial backwater full of larger-than life 'characters' boozing their heads off in stage-Irish pubs, but as a troubled modern entity, plagued by drugs, unemployment, high taxes, disillusionment and emigration. No city of 'The Rare Ould Times' here. Instead, Bolger […] painted a portrait of a Dublin that was being choked by the modern world, its youth in turmoil and its older citizens crippled by despair
>
> (MacAnna, 1991, p.21)

Bolger's writing seemed prophetic, exposing an ever-widening social gap, and capturing a bubbling discontent, now visible as a core legacy of the Celtic Tiger (Allen, 2002). Bolger's plays and novels, such as *The Night Shift* (1986) and *A Journey Home* (1990), portrayed the interrelations between legislators, commentators, and booming business, and exposed how economic and political decisions made in these social circles manifested in individual Irish working-class lives and communities. Bolger's plays stage such dark realities before conversation about those marginalised was fashionable or lucrative which is evident in Michael Pierses' statement that,

> This capitalist interrelation between the vilified working class and the dominant bourgeoisie in Ireland, as well as the horrific sexual and social abuses it contained, is something Dermot Bolger was keen to elucidate, at the onset of the 'Robinsonian' era in Ireland, before it was popular or profitable to do so.
>
> (Pierse, 2010, p.92)

Bolger himself stated that his writing was the result of a personal anger at actual social injustices, and the fictional narratives he presented in his work sought to offer a podium for the real lives lived and forgotten in Irish society. It is the position of this thesis that, by speculating on Bolger's personal position and politics, criticism of his work overlooked the importance, for the 'losers' of the boom of the empowering emancipatory nature of his chosen themes, and narrative structures. As Pierse states; 'Bolger sought to relate the hidden narratives of those who […] were deemed outsiders by dominant cultural norms.' (2010, p.) This is in stark contrast to the criticism of Roddy Doyle, yet this criticism is just as paradoxical. Kiberd, for example, juxtaposes Doyle as the ying to Bolger's yang and presents his work as more accomplished cultural criticism:

> By contrast, novelists such as Roddy Doyle […] who took a more relaxed, even humorous, approach to Irish pieties, often seemed to achieve more as artists and social analysts. Doyle, in particular, explored in his Barrytown Trilogy the life of Dublin housing estates. He was one of the first artists to register the ways in which the relationship between "First" and "Third" Worlds was enacted daily in the streets of the capital city.
>
> (Kiberd, 1995, p.611)

But it is the position of this thesis that Doyle rarely shows the 'First' and 'Third' worlds suggested by Kiberd side by side or in any form that would generate the kind of insightful cultural critique for which he is celebrated. If anything, Doyle presents the manifestation of the 'Third' world in Irish social stratification for consumption by the 'First' worlds of the Irish social order. The 'relaxed and humorous' approach taken by Doyle is said, in dominant criticism, to have drawn attention to the plight of the Irish poor. However, the narrative structure used by Doyle confines the working class in stereotype (Chapter 4), ghettoising their culture and presenting them for the comic consumption of the more privileged in society. Doyle's structure, despite popular acclaim, ghettoised the working class of Northside Dublin, and presented their internal culture, the idiosyncrasies and mannerisms distinctive to the Northside, as comic relief for the more affluent of Ireland. Doyle presented Northsiders in a grotesque way, and laughed at - rather than with - the most impoverished in Irish society. It is precisely the use of grotesque humour that refutes Kiberd's claim of Doyle as social analyst and rather reveals further his enabling of what Allen described as a polite social stratification during the boom culture in Ireland, however often attempts were made to claim him as a champion of working-class communities. Where Kiberd claimed Bolger reified old pastoral

notions, it was in fact the grotesque humour of Doyle that reified social structure. In his article 'Laughing Over Lost Causes', Andrew Silver highlights how grotesque humour reinforces class structure;

> It is essential to such humor that there be no threat or general discontent among these marginal grotesques, and, of course, there should be little or no connection between the causes of their poverty and the humorist's reading audience. These humorists reinforced, rather than called into question, the means of both social and economic power, and reified rather than challenged the prevailing class structure.
>
> (Silver, 1996)

This speaks to the first component of the trinity of power, sex and class which form the basis of this critical reading: power. To explore the use of this trinity in Doyle's works, the fictional narratives of two novels from the trilogy will be considered. While many examples can be found of the reification of social structure, Doyle's most popular, and most profitable, novel (1987), film (1991), and recent hit musical (2013), *The Commitments*, is a clear example of the generation of narratives of oppression by means of grotesque humour. In support of this, a review of the dramatic narrative of *The Van*, and the character, Bimbo, argues that there is a continued debasement of working and lower class Northsiders throughout Doyle's canon. A tendency to make them masters of their own misfortune and therefore justify their circumstance rather than challenge it drives this. In sharp contrast to this, Bolger's *From These Green Heights* and *The Townlands of Brazil* provide a narrative structure that acknowledges not only an individual's power of choice to but also the influence of broader power structures in the wider environment which affects and or inhibits those choices. To clarify how these narrative structures may be

understood as oppressive, the philosophies of Richard Kearney and Paul Ricoeur in relation to narrative structure and agency will be employed here.

Power

> Every life is in search of a narrative.
>
> (Kearney, 2002, p.4)

Kearney suggests telling stories is as essential to the human condition as eating; it is how we share our world. 'What works at the level of communal history works also at the level of individual history. When someone asks you who you are, you tell your story.' (Kearney, 2002, p.4) But as he also explains, life is a process of searching out narrative meaning. To tell a story, first you must have a story to tell, and locating a narrative identity is inherent to the process of being human. 'Every life is in search of narrative. We all seek, willy-nilly, to introduce some kind of concord into the everyday discord and dispersal we find about us. (Kearney, 2002, p.4) It is a way to make sense of a disjointed world and an attempt to locate ourselves within it and, as Kearney contends, it is the most feasible way to generate a personal and local identity. 'In our postmodern era of fragmentation and fracture, […] narrative provides us with one of our most viable form of identity – individual and communal.' (Kearney, 2002, p.4) Paul Ricoeur in his influential text *Time and Narrative: Vol 1* (1990) provides a basis for the narrative philosophy of Kearney:

> Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative, narrative in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.
>
> (Ricoeur, 1990, p,3).

Narrative structures are therefore integral to the formation of culture and cultural identity. According to Henry Giroux in his influential book *Fugitive*

Cultures: Race, Violence and Youth, an in-depth analysis of culture provides critical insight into societal power structures:

> Culture is where the social gravity of power is organized in both the circulation and use of representations and in the material experiences that shape everyday life.
>
> (Giroux, 1996, p.17)

Ricoeur suggests that there is a cyclical nature to the process of narrative informing identity and identity informing narrative and that at the core of this cycle is the human experience, which makes cultural narratives imperative when analysing societal power structures. '[W]hat is ultimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of human experience.' (Ricoeur, 1990, p,3) The process of representation in narrative involves some form of imitation. 'Imitating or representing is a mimetic activity inasmuch as it produces something, namely the organization of events by emplotment' (Ricoeur, 1990, p.34). How this imitation is structured in the emplotment of these events is important in affecting this cyclical process of forming and informing cultural identity.

> It is one thing for whoever does the imitating, therefore for the author of the mimetic activity no matter what the art form or what the quality of the characters in question, that this author acts as "narrator". […] It is another thing to make the characters the authors of the representation in that they are presented as functioning and in action.
>
> (Ricoeur, 1990, p.36)

In the case of the mimetic activity in the narrative structure employed by Doyle, the Northside characters are presented as the latter described by Ricoeur, they are 'functioning in action'. This is an important distinction as the author is

distanced from the characters and the characters are the focus of the action. 'Either the poet speaks directly and thus narrates what his characters do or he allows them to speak and speaks indirectly through them, while they "do" the drama' (Ricoeur, 1990, p.36). In both *The Commitments* and *The Van*, the mimetic activity generated to create the characters shows them in action, doing the drama themselves. While this is presented as a positive narrative structure by Ricoeur it becomes paradoxical in the case of Doyle as the characters are produced in such a way that obscures the wider social structures in which they navigate as presents them as in action causing their own demise. In discussing the ability of realism to have a social impact, Brecht asserts that realism should be 'reproduced in such a way as to promote insight into society's mechanism and motivate socialist action' (1964, p. 310). The symbolic forms of the narrative structure of these novels vilify the characters represented and in turn, in the cyclical nature of narrative informing identity, vilify real lives, as lived by Northside Dubliners. This stems from the evaluation of the mimetic action as Ricoeur suggests;

> As a function of the norms immanent in a culture, actions can be estimated or evaluated, that is, judged according to a scale of moral preferences. They thereby receive a relative value, which says that this action is more valuable that that one. These degrees of value, first attributed to actions, can be extended to the agents themselves, who are held to be good or bad, better or worse
>
> (Ricoeur, 1990, p.58)

This argument enables a critical reading of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*. Described as 'the hardest working band in Ireland', the goal of the young band put together by working and unemployed Northside youths is to bring 'Soul to Dublin'. The reason being that soul is the music of the working

class. Music for the people. The band members are talented, their work ethic is evident, and they excel at replicating American Soul for the Irish stage. Doyle capitalises on popular music and the hope of working-class young, and they are on the brink of realising their dream of gaining a record contract when it all falls apart;

> Jimmy took one more long breath, clapped his hands, rubbed them, and went back inside to tell The Commitments.
>
> But they didn't exist anymore. Somewhere in the quarter of an hour Jimmy had been negotiating with Dave from Eejit, The Commitments had broken up. […]
>
> - How come I didn't see annythin'? Jimmy asked.
> - It happened very fuckin' fast, said Outspan. – I didn't seen ann'thin' either an' I was here, sure.
>
> (Doyle, 1992, p.130-131)

Despite all their hard work and talent, in a mere fifteen minutes the dreams of *The Commitments* fall apart and they all slink away to the lives they held previous. The cause of the breakup could be attributed to immaturity. The band struggle with competing egos but they struggle most with the open sexuality of the three female members. It is precisely the sexual agency of the women that causes the final bust-up and the rapid decline of the band. This reinforces the pure/impure binary, discussed in chapter 4, regarding working class, particularly female, sexuality. It is not just the ultimate failure of the band which is problematic. It is the ethical presentation of the characters throughout which legitimises their failure and makes it seem inevitable. There is little evidence of any real friendships in the band, and they are all highly sexually charged and presented as almost feral. The lads refer to women as 'the brassers [or] the gee' (Doyle, 1992, p.11) and only ever really describe women in terms of their physical attributes. The women are seemingly sexually empowered but even

this is presented as negative as it causes the demise of the band and the women are presented as conniving and manipulative with their sexuality:

- I think Joey left because of us.
- Wha d'yah mean?
- Me an' Bernie and Nat'lie.
- Because yis all got off with him, d'yeh mean?
- Yeah. Sort of. – He was scared of us.
- D'yeh reckon? – D'yeh mind if I ask? Said Jimmy.
- How come yis all got off with him?
- Ah, we were only messin', yeh know. We did not like him but. It wasn't just messin'. – It became a sort of joke between us, […]
- I think I went a bit too far though.
- How, like?
- I told him I was pregnant
- GOOD JAYSIS

Jimmy roared laughing […]

- I didn't really think I was pregnant. I shouldn't o' done it. I just wanted to see wha' he'd do.
- He fucked off to America.
- I know, said Imelda. – The shi'e.

Jimmy giggled. So did Imelda.

(Doyle, 1992, p.135-136)

This makes it difficult to feel any empathy or sympathy with the characters in *The Commitments* and generates a negative ethical quality. As in Doyle's plays for the Passion Machine, their misfortune is framed as merited, understandable and inevitable. However, their failure to fully realise or maintain success is not isolated to the narrative structure of *The Commitments*. At the beginning of *The*

Van we meet the character, Bimbo, immediately after he has lost his job in the local bread and cake factory. Bimbo has provided more than two decades of service to the factory, and is a casualty of outsourcing and redundancy. He recalls his innocence when he first started in the factory.

> I was more excited abou' the cakes than I was abou' the money, that's how young I was.
>
> (Doyle, 1922, p.413)

Now a grown man with a family, Bimbo is on the dole after a lifetime of service. Or as he puts it facetiously, he is a 'man of leisure now' (Doyle, 1992, p.412). From this perspective the analysis of Doyle as cultural critic seems merited, however, once again the narrative structure, just like The Commitments, confines the characters in a trope of pre-destined failure, as they are presented as unethical and their misfortune therefore merited. Doyle again pursues the doomed hopes of the working class in Bimbo's dreams of setting up his own in business as a chip van owner, with his redundancy money. Despite years of successful service to the corporate food industry and, presumably, a learned knowledge of its regulations, Bimbo is revealed as feckless in his own endeavours and his business struggles. One notable incident in particular rationalises the inevitable demise of Bimbo's business dreams; an angry customer returns with complaints about his fish supper;

- Oh fuck – What is it?

Hang on though –

- It's white, said Jimmy Sr.
- It's a nappy! The man told him.
- Wha'! Fuck off, would yeh.

- He's righ', Jimmy, said Bimbo. – It's a Pamper; folded up. My God, that's shockin'.
- Shut up! Jimmy Sr hissed at him.
- - I must have put it in the batter –
- Shut up!
- What is it? Said Sharon.

The man wasn't angry now; he looked like he needed comfort.

- Is it a used one? Jimmy Sr asked him, and he crossed his fingers.
- No!
- Ah well, said Jimmy Sr. – That's alrigh' then.

(Doyle, 1992, p.541)

This blasé attitude results in the complete deterioration both of Bimbo's business and his friendship with Jimmy Sr. He eventually drives his beloved chip van into the sea on Dollymount strand in a drunken stupor, before returning to shore with his friend Jimmy. This is done on a whim, despite the van itself being Bimbo's only asset, and only current means of employment.

Both the young people in *The Commitments* and Bimbo are agents of their own demise; destined to fail, regardless of their talent or experience. The characters have a distinctly negative aura, which makes it difficult to challenge the wider circumstance in which they operate, as their social context is seen as unconnected to an innate inability to succeed. This narrative construction recalls Ricoeur's reading of the Aristolean premise of 'unmerited misfortune' (Ricoeur, 1990, p.59) which argues that pity is most likely felt if the tragic circumstances of the characters represented is out of their control and/or unfair.

> The Poetics presupposes not just "doers" but characters endowed with ethical qualities that make them noble or vile. If tragedy can represent them as "better" and comedy as "worse" than actual human beings, it is because the practical understanding authors share with their audiences necessarily involves an evaluation of the characters and their actions in terms of good and bad
>
> (Ricoeur, 1990, p.59)

It is this process adopted by Doyle that causes the cyclical nature of identity informing narrative and narrative informing identity, as previously discussed, to become a vicious one. In the case of *The Commitments* and *The Van*, the strategic use of laughter as resilience in poverty is subverted. Instead, the characters themselves become the comedy, and the logic of Doyle's narrative is based on an implied ethical lack in Bimbo, and the young band members. This critical approach to language and action problematises the championing of Doyle a voice for the voiceless – which implies an intention to empower. The effect of the narrative structure used to represent working-class Northsiders is oppressive, as it ghettoises real lives lived, and identities created, in a closed cycle of failure.

Counterpointing this, the narrative structure used by Dermot Bolger exposes and challenges the manifestation of this vicious cycle and the metaphorical burden it becomes for people who suffer stereotypes generated from such representations. In *From These Green Heights* (2004), Bolger portrays the complex impact of reactionary fictional images of the people of Ballymun, showing some people accepting the consequences of living in the shadow of negative identity, and others reacting against it. An important point to note here is that, just like Doyle, Bolger presents his characters as functioning in action, but by offering a more complex representation of Northside characters, and most importantly acknowledging the power structures at play,

the mimetic activity of the narrative structure challenges ghettoization as the community of characters are shown not to exist in isolation. This can be seen specifically in the tumultuous love story of Dessie and Marie in *From These Green Heights*. The play follows the course of their young relationship and how the effects of the generations that have gone before and the environment that is developing around them influence the path of their life as a couple. Their raw feelings for each other are affected and altered by these circumstances:

> **Dessie** I love you
> **Marie** I can't hear you
> **Dessie** I said, I love you
> **Marie** I can't afford to hear you, Dessie. You're going nowhere
> **Dessie** I work hard at school.
> **Marie** For what? There's no opportunity here. You'll find a dead end job and the worst thing is that you'll be happy in it.
> **Dessie** Is being happy a sin?
> **Marie** It's a trap. […] Pack your bag and come away too, somewhere where they've never heard of Ballymun
>
> (Bolger, 2010, p.56-57)

Dessie and Marie are the embodiment of the dichotomy generated in boom Ireland. The culture of discontent critiqued by Kieran Allen is staged here: Marie, and her frustration with accepting her lot, represents a growing culture of discontent, and Dessie represents the option of politely taking your place in line. In this case, and in contrast to the characters in Doyle's novels, Ireland's wider social structures have a direct impact on the horizon of choices available to the characters. This generates an idea of space as in process rather than a ghettoised closed-border community. It is precisely Bolger's opening out of narrative structure which is empowering, because 'that is how shifts between social

settlements happen. [There] are moments when the future seems open. (Massey, 2007, p.x)' The expanded future desired by Marie does not involve trying to access Kiberd's 'vibrant Dublin', as she suggests the cultural accident of being from Ballymun would inhibit that, but involves knowing that if she can escape that label her horizon of choices would be different.

The perceived 'bleakness' of Bolger's work is located in his project of challenging power structures at play in Irish society. For the first half of *From These Green Heights* Dessie's father, Christy, struggles desperately with external pressures on his identity as a man and a father – firstly, arising from relocation from the inner city to Ballymun; secondly, with unemployment. His despair crescendos through the play to a point where this once devoted keeper of homing pigeons obliterates his flock, in what he sees as an act of mercy. This echoes the escape of the exotic birds in Mercier's play *Drowning* discussed in chapter 3. Yet in *Drowning* the exotic birds want out of 'this kip' (Mercier, 1984, p28-29, Unpublished) and escape leaving the Mother character powerless. This 'mercy killing' is a metaphor for Christy's powerlessness within his economic situation and highlights the daily humiliation and degradation experienced by economic casualties. This working-class man has no control over his situation, his home, or his employment prospects, so he takes what little control he has, and relieves the pigeons of their stress, something he wishes he could do for himself. This is in direct conflict with *Drowning* and the Mother character imprisoning the birds in her own misery prompting their escape. Bolger accurately presents Northsiders as what John Kenneth Galbraith describes as a 'functional underclass' (Galbraith, 1992, p.30). Caught up in a system of constant supply and resupply, and discarded when industry and economy turns, and they are no longer needed. Far from being authors and masters of their own misfortune, they are caught in a cycle of the wider systems in society, to which 'the underclass is deeply functional, all industrial countries have one in greater or lesser measure and in one form or another' (Galbraith,

1992, p.31). According to Galbraith, the cyclical insecurity of this functional underclass disables the life chances of the poorest in society, and when a country goes through any form of economic growth, this widens to include migrant workers also.

An interrogation of the juxtaposition of the two acts of Bolger's The Townlands of Brazil (2006) provides an opportunity to employ Galbraith's theoretical framework. Act one is a prequel, and act two a sequel, to the first instalment of the *Ballymun Trilogy, From These Green Heights*. In *The Townlands of Brazil*, Bolger juxtaposes the plight of 1960s' Irish economic migrants with the circumstances of migrant workers arriving to service the Celtic Tiger boom. Act I is set in Ballymun in the 1960s, before the iconic flat complexes were built. We meet Eileen, and witness her tragic love for Michael who has moved from rural north Dublin to Liverpool to work as a labourer. Michael is killed on site in the UK before he and Eileen – now pregnant – have a chance to marry, leaving her to face either institutionalisation in a notorious 'Magdalen Laundry' or escape to England. Act two is set in Ballymun at the beginning of the 21st century. We meet Monica, an economic migrant from Poland who has come to work to support her young child, following the death of her husband in a car crash while working as a labourer in Dublin. In both acts economic migrants undertake work defined by Galbraith as 'physically demanding, socially unacceptable or otherwise disagreeable occupations' (1992, p.33) These two acts serve as book ends to *From These Green Heights* and highlight the circumstances of the functional underclass through national growth and globalisation. The staged lives of the Bolger's characters expose systematic, cyclical oppression of the poorest people in Irish society.

> So much is accepted. What is not accepted, and indeed is little mentioned, is that the underclass is integrally a part of a larger economic process and,

> more importantly, that it serves the living standard and the comfort of the more favoured community. Economic progress would be far more uncertain and certainly less rapid without it. The economically fortunate, not excluding those who speak with greatest regret of the existence of this class, are heavily dependent on its presence.
>
> (Galbraith, 1992, p.31)

The juxtaposition of the forced economic migration of the Irish in act one with the forced economic migration of the Polish in act two is an act of solidarity. This is a common feature of Bolger's writing. and works to bridge gaps between communities perceived by each other as radically different. Solidarity challenges common 'us and them' narratives that pit natives against newcomers, 'in part because solidarity is a collective relative that mediates between the individual interests and the community (or according to some accounts, between individual interests and the communal good); solidarity marks unity that neither subsumes the individual nor represents solely the community.' (Scholz, 2015, p.725) There is a parallel between Eileen's circumstance in act one and Monica's circumstance in act two that squashes the 'us and them' in favour of a relationship of 'us', with different accents, which exposes class obligations to make choices based on societal pressure and economic circumstance. The similarities in each character's narrative generate an equality of condition that seeks solidarity. Bolger's work explores systems of power, but his characters themselves are vehicles within rather than drivers of the system. The narrative structure used by Bolger is empowering because it exposes the system, but also presents the characters as in process. His people represent positive heterogeneity and allow for space, in this case the Northside, to be in process; therefore open to change. This is expressed by Brecht as the goal of realism. He states:

> Our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, independent of conventions […] revealing the casual complex of society/unmasking the ruling viewpoints of the rulers/ writing from the standpoint of the class that has in readiness the broadest solutions for the urgent difficulties besetting human society/ emphasizing the factor of development/ concretely making it possible to abstract.
>
> (Brecht, 1964, p. 202-203)

By contrast Doyle's work operates from the negative position of difference. The characters in his work are drivers of their own societal position. They appear to be the cause, not the result, of their circumstance. His two-dimensional presentation of class encloses the idiosyncrasies of an inward-looking culture, concealing and ghettoizing nuanced difference. In the case of Bolger, identities forged through interrelations that generate space, represent the Northside as positively heterogeneous. 'It is that liveness, the complexity and openness of the configurational itself, the positive multiplicity, which is important for an appreciation of the spatial' (Massey, 2005, p.13). The borders generated by stereotype become somewhat permeable and there is a possibility for new discourses. To further analyse this, it is important to explore how each trilogy stages and explores sex, the second component of O'Toole's triad.

SEX

In 'Women, Domesticity and the Family; Recent Feminist Work in Irish Cultural Studies' Clair Wills notes that 'social agencies, including prominently the Catholic Church, encouraged women to introduce 'enlightened' notions of order and hygiene into the family, while seeking to inhibit the development of individualist aspirations to personal pleasure, domesticity and romance' (2001,

p.33). Doyle's presentation of working-class sexuality, particularly female sexuality, as dirty or impure suggests the working class as unenlightened within this context, but his representation also seeks to inhibit personal pleasure and romance (see Chapter 4). His preferred approach to narrative emplotment confines the working class in an image of impure un-enlightenment, while offering no challenge to the repression of individual desire by socially imposed conservative notions of public and private. 'The bourgeois individual is not born until one discovers the pleasures of privacy.' (Chakrabarty, 1992, p.9) In her 2015 UCD podcast 'Silence and Solitude' Louise Callinan draws attention to Doyle's depiction of Barrytown and argues that 'a notable aspect of Roddy Doyle's fictional locale of Barrytown is the dissolution of the boundaries that exist between public and private. Within both the Rabbitte household and the wider community, public and private are fluid.' (2015, p.2) Doyle presents this fictional Northside community as open to public consumption, and this ghettoises the working class he represents. His focus on the patriarchal perspective and his fluidity of the public and private render the idea that his work empowers the working class, ironic. 'Indeed, these aspects of the novel effectively sanction the middle-class construction of privacy and privilege that Doyle is often read as wanting to resist.' (McGlynn, 2005, p.142) Wills' point is significant when comparing and contrasting the differing representations of sex in the two trilogies.

> In Dublin Renaissance writing, sexual themes and imagery were to the fore in representing the fissures between normative cultural production and the characteristically more gritty variety favoured by a new wave of Irish authors.
>
> (Pierse, 2010, p.93)

In 'The run of ourselves: Shame, guilt and confession in post-Celtic Tiger Irish media', Marcus Free and Claire Scully draw attention to 'a learned predisposition towards habitual and corporeal modesty and self-regulation peculiar to Irish Catholicism' (2015, p.2). They suggest that this peculiarity still exists in Ireland despite the country seemingly moving towards being a more secular nation, and that following the Celtic Tiger bust, the notion of collective shame was commonplace in Irish media, a sign of a powerful nostalgia for an 'Ireland of collective humility, modesty and discipline.' (Free and Scully, 2015, p.3) Although these views are not defined in religious dogma they are still rooted in Catholic ideals, and 'key to this discourse was the promotion of collective discipline and self-denial as moral asceticism.' (Free and Scully, 2015, p.9) The juxtaposition of the representations of sex in both trilogies reveal a tendency to present working-class sexuality as feral in Doyle's trilogy and the tendency towards the romantic and personal pleasure in Bolger which subverts Catholic ideals while also presenting working class sexuality as enlightened. While there is heavy emphasis on how women were oppressed in Ireland in the twentieth century, 'we should not overlook the fact that the emerging family structures also offered women a new space for the fulfilment of their desires, fantasies and legitimate aspirations.' (Wills, 2001, p.35) In this light Bolger captures what Doyle never does, the desires and fantasies of women, especially regarding their sexuality. In Bolger's trilogy, female sexual agency is explicitly articulated. One key moment that encapsulates this is when Marie exclaims, 'A girl with her skirt up runs faster than a boy with his pants down', (Bolger, 2010, p.26). In *From These Green Heights* the young love affair between Marie and Dessie, although complex and marred by the depressed economic landscape around them, is full of the individualist personal pleasure and romance described by Wills. It is a direct challenge to the sexually oppressive climate of twentieth-century Catholic Ireland. Yet, it is also presented as compatible with values of order and hygiene, and therefore is doubly combative in challenging

both the working-class stereotype and the conservative Catholic notions of personhood. Bolger captures the innocence of youth with the consuming raw energy of adolescence as they have intercourse for the first time in a field;

> **Dessie** Her tight white jeans and body aching as she ran…
> **Marie** His stupid bloody army jacket and long hair and elephant flares …
> **Dessie** And when she stopped near the stream …
> *In each other's arms now, they slide to the ground, with* **Dessie** *on top, kissing passionately.*
> **Marie** I knew that he knew how much I wanted the feel of him inside me …
> **Dessie** (looks up to address audience) I'd been carrying around that bloody condom I bought from a school pal for so long that I was afraid it would be mouldy.
>
> (Bolger, 2010, p.62-63)

Marie is sexually empowered and the act with Dessie is mutual. There is a certain level of modesty to their encounter while it maintains passion and even in the frenzy of lust Dessie is disciplined and responsible in his use of contraception.

Doyle's scene of teenage sex in a field is in stark contrast to Bolger's. While not part of the trilogy, *The Woman Who Walks into Doors* contains a scene in a similar vein but that is gritty and harsh. This scene, discussed in chapter 4, is paradoxical. The character Paula initially described the sex as love making to immediately changing the terminology to more salacious language. The emphasis is on the male, even while the episode is re-told from a female perspective, which makes Paula's experience seems almost incidental. The gritty narrative and language such as 'fucked me in a field' (Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p.16) despite the mention of love present the sexual act as dirty or impure.

'The word ''impure'' denotes something that really exists in nature and which was revealed to people in terms of something dangerous or risky.' (Speltini and Passini, 2014, p.207) The danger associated with Charlo, and Paula's willingness to overlook this because 'He was a ride, he had a scar' (Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p.16) makes her later experience of severe domestic abuse seem somehow a result of personal choice.

Even within the realm of marriage there is a stark contrast in the dignity of sexual relations between man and wife in each trilogy. Comparing the *The Van* and *The Townlands of Brazil* highlights this, while there are marked similarities. Both couples have not been intimate with each other for some time and have struggled to talk about it. In *The Van*, Jimmy Sr and Veronica are intimate yet there is no real differentiation to how Jimmy speaks about his wife and how he objectifies other women, like all male characters in the trilogy do:

> That was the first time they'd done the business in a good while; two months nearly. Made love. He's never called it that; it sounded thick. Riding your wife was more than just riding, especially when yis hadn't done it in months. […]
>
> Veronica had caught him feeling her legs to see if they were smooth, to see if she had shaved them.
>
> - What're you doing?
> - Nothin'
>
> She hadn't really caught him; he'd have been doing it anyway. But he'd had to keep feeling them up and down from her knees up to her gee after she'd said that.
>
> (Doyle, 1992, p.406)

The use of the slang term 'gee' for his wife's genitals mocks the dignity of a loving and intimate marriage. Seemingly even in his own consciousness Jimmy

is acutely aware of public perception of his view towards being intimate with his wife. This corroborates Louise Callinan's contention that there is a 'dissolution of the boundaries that exist between public and private' (2015, p.2) in Doyle's trilogy. Once again Bolger refutes the stereotype of the emotionally stunted working class and stages couples' ability to find comfort in each other through the worst of times:

> **Carmel** That was the night Christy came to me shaking with desire, the night I stayed his hand reaching for the condoms in the bedside drawer. The night we threw caution to the wind and afterwards lay in each other's arms, instinctively knowing that a child had been conceived. The night we started to live again, when, for better or worse, in sickness or health, we staked our claim here to the future.
>
> (Bolger, 2010, p.48)

Probably most problematic of all the themes in Doyle's trilogy is the view that *The Snapper* is about 'Sharon keeping all the gossips guessing', as described in the programme for the Dublin initiative *One City One Book* (2015). The fact that much of the criticism and analysis of *The Snapper* describes it as a humorous narrative of teenage pregnancy reveals a worrying attitude to violence against women and highlights a vulnerability of working-class women being blamed for crimes against them. Discussing *The Snapper*, Callinan describes 'subject matter of an unplanned pregnancy outside of marriage' (2015, p.3). Dermot McCarthy describes the novel as an exploration of 'Sharon Rabbitte's pregnancy and its effect on herself, her family, and most importantly, her father.' (2003, p.52) Caramine White accounts that the film version of the novel was 'marketed as "the feel-good movie of the year"' (2001, p.62). Kersti Tarien Powell notes that while Doyle deals with problems such as unplanned pregnancy, 'none of these problems is tackled on a serious or tragic level.'

(2004, p.95) Much of the criticism focuses on what is perceived as humour in the both the novel and the film and the conditions under which Sharon becomes pregnant rarely make more than a footnote in the majority of criticism. When the scene that describes Sharon's encounter with the biological father of her unborn child is isolated from this so-called humour there is a much darker side to *The Snapper* that challenges the light-hearted approach to criticism of the novel:

> Anyway, she was shivering but she didn't move; to go back in. Pity. She couldn't move really. Then there was a hand on her shoulder. – Alrigh', Sharon? he'd said. Then it was blank and then they were kissing rough – she wasn't really her mouth was just open – and then blank again and that was it really. She couldn't remember much more. She knew they'd done it – or just he'd done it […] He was gone. It was like waking up. She didn't know if it had happened. She wanted to be at home. At home in bed. Her knickers were gone. And she was all wet and cold there. She wanted to get into bed. She went straight home. She staggered a lot, even off the path. […]
>
> She wondered a few times if what had happened could be called rape. She didn't know. […] There was one more thing she remembered; what he'd said after he's put his hand on her shoulder and asked her was she alright.
>
> - I've always liked the look of you, Sharon.
>
> Sharon groaned.
>
> The dirty bastard.
>
> (Doyle, 1992, p.185)

This is a rape, as Sharon is too intoxicated to have consensual sex. While the expression of Mr Burgess being a 'dirty bastard' suggests criticism of the act the fact that this is a rape is never challenged. Victor Tadros 'define[s] consent

as an agreement made by choice with capacity and freedom. (2006, p.521) It is clear in the novel that Sharon did not have this capacity. It seems like the critical reception of *The Snapper* participates in a national reflex of victim blaming. 'Victims are often blamed for their own misfortunes.' (Harber, Williams, Podolski, 2015, p.603) Victim blaming is commonplace as there is a difficulty in processing or being able to quantify a victims' predicament:

> Encountering victims can threaten just world beliefs, which produces a discomforting dissonance. Victim blaming reduces this dissonance. If victims' misfortunes can be ascribed to their own poor judgment or deficient character, then their hardships become compatible with a fair if sometimes harsh world. We might pity the drunk dancing near a precipice, but this self-induced peril does not challenge existential fairness and his mishaps therefore do not threaten our just world beliefs. The just world balance sheet can be similarly rectified for encounters with genuine victims; people who are not responsible for their travails. This is done by unduly attributing victims' plights to their thoughts, characters, or actions; in short, by victim blaming.
>
> (Harber, Williams, Podolski, 2015, p.603)

In Sharon's case, a large part of her being blamed for her own rape could stem from her intoxication at the time of the attack. Doyle himself suggests this when he stated 'I wouldn't personally consider it a rape. I do believe that he behaved very wrongly in taking advantage of a drunk woman. But again, does that make it illegal? […] I suspect that it is not the first time she has had sex against the car when she has been drunk.' (Doyle in White, 2001, p.150-151).The element of intoxication is a much debated issue in sexual violence against females. 'Academic studies have shown that if the female complainant is portrayed as drunk, she is perceived as less credible and the defendant is seen as less likely to be criminally culpable compared with a sober victim' (Joe

Stone, 2013, p.384). This seems particularly true in the case of Sharon as the rape is side-lined in the interests of centring the effects of her resulting pregnancy as Doyle's narrative drivers:

> Surprisingly, not the pregnancy itself but the circumstances surrounding it drive a wedge between the Rabbitte family members. Jimmy Sr […] is upset that Sharon's poor taste in men has made her family the laughingstock of the neighbourhood; he becomes very angry at Sharon and gives her the silent treatment. For her part, Sharon refuses to accept blame for her condition, and the tension between the two begins to tear the family apart.
>
> (White, 2001, p.63)

The view of Sharon needing to accept blame is a problematic one considering she was attacked by a neighbour but this criticism reinforces a culture of victim blaming as outlined. Sharon shows classic signs of suffering the shame and stigma of being a victim, as we see her struggle with people's view of her situation. 'For victims, this blaming is experienced as insult added to injury. It impugns their morals, demeans their judgment, and diminishes their right to sympathy at the height of their suffering. (Harber, Williams, Podolski, 2015, p.603) Sharon struggles for personal autonomy as her family and the wider community impose themselves on her. 'Sharon can recapture her authority only through a public display of a simultaneously liberating and repressive social norm: deprecating humor. Only by submitting to public involvement in her private life is Sharon permitted to carry her child successfully to term.' (McGlynn, 2005, p.142)

The presentation of sexual narratives in Doyle's trilogy as dirty or impure and what amounts to a denial of violence against women refutes the notion of the trilogy as empowering. Massey contends that 'It is only in our experience […] that things are held fast' (2001, p.3) so while space and time are constantly in process it is the narrative structures that we employ that keep communities

oppressed. Bolger allows for people to be in process and delivers narratives of sexual empowerment for both men and women while challenging pastoral notions of personal pleasure and romance. By presenting the Northside in this regard 'the identities of place are always, unfixed, contested and multiple. […] Places viewed this way are open and porous. (Massey, 2001, p.5)

CLASS

> To make a politics of place possible is about explicitly questioning the construction of that place.
>
> (Massey, 2007, p.411)

Expanding on Massey's notion of negative difference and positive heterogeneity is her contention that space is constructed through intersecting social relations. Essential to this is the gendering of space, and how perceived gender roles manifest in space. Explorations of how these spaces are imagined and represented is key to discussing imbalance in geographies of identity, because, Massey insists that geography it integral to constructions of gender, and the imaginary ways in which gender is manufactured continually develops unevenly.

> How social relations intersect, merge and coexist defines a culture, and how this manifests in spatial relations both implicitly and explicitly contributes to societal assumptions around gender, in their very construction as culturally specific ideas – in terms both of the conceptual nature of that construction and of its substantive content – and in the overlapping and interplaying of the sets of characteristics and connotations with which each is associated. Particularly ways in thinking about space and place are up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations.

(Massey, 2007, p.2)

As Massey suggests, imaginative geographies of gender and the intersectionality of these in space is a contributing factor to the actual development of uneven geographies. In alignment with Ricoeur's contention of identity forming narrative and narrative forming identity, the presentation of imagined geographies of gender and how characteristics intersect and become culturally explicit inform cultural identities. For these imagined geographies to adequately portray a positive heterogeneity in opposition to negative difference there is a requirement to represent a simultaneity of various perspectives operating within the same space.

> Such a way of conceptualising the spatial, moreover, inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces; cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism. Most evidently this is so because the social relations of space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it.
>
> (Massey, 2007, p.3)

Bolger deliberately represents a multiplicity of intersecting perspectives in a shared space, and his dramatic action works through how they manifest in gendered social relations. In *From These Green Heights,* for example, part of Christy's plight as he struggles with feelings of hopelessness comes from his alienation from employment and his feelings of loss of identity; he experiences dislocation, while his wife remains in her familiar role and place:

> **Christy** You know who you are. You wash, cook and raise our son well, you've nothing to be ashamed of.

Carmel (confused) What shite are you talking now?

Christy I'm talking about what I am. I'd a trade that was meant to keep us going for life.

(Bolger, 2010, p.28)

Christy links this displacement with shame as he equates his dislocation with a notion that since he no longer occupies his designated space his role in the family is also redundant. This is another example of how characters in Bolger's trilogy embody the Galbraith's theory of a functional underclass, in a system in which 'a normal person is proud of his or her work' (1992, p.32) Even if the work itself is tiresome, or deemed less prestigious, pride is located in the rationale of its being for family provision. The spatialization of gender in the configuration of identity and the complexities of how these intersect is a feature of Bolger's trilogy. The tensions of dislocation from gendered space are also visible in Doyle's trilogy. In *The Van*, Jimmy Sr is challenged by his youngest son, Darren:

He pointed his fork at Darren.

- Don't you forget who paid for tha' dinner in front of you, son, righ'.
- I know who paid for it, said Darren. – The state.

Jimmy Sr looked like he'd been told that someone had died.

- Yeh prick, Jimmy Jr said to Darren.

But no one said anything else. Linda and Tracy didn't look at each other. Jimmy Sr took another sip from his wine.

- Very nice, he said.

Then he got up.

- Em – the jacks, he said.

(Doyle, 1992 p.440)

Jimmy Sr's dominance as patriarch of the family is challenged by the acknowledgement of his son that the family provisions do not come directly from the toil of his father. Jimmy Sr experiences an intense shame from not operating within his gendered space. It is this shame that becomes a springboard for Jimmy Sr to go into business with his friend Bimbo. As male and female space is gendered in Bolger's *From These Green Heights*, 'it is significant that there is no documented instance of Veronica leaving the domestic space of the Rabbitte home throughout the novel.' (Callinan, 2015, p.4) A comparative look at these gendered spaces within both trilogies also reveals a generational anxiety. Both Carmel and Christy, and Jimmy and Veronica, represent a transitional generation giving way to a younger, more secular generation more influenced by modernisation and the booming culture in Ireland at the beginning of the 90s. But as Clair Wills points out, 'it is crucial to be alert to the ways in which modernization can incorporate traditional modes of feeling and behaving.' (2001, p.36) Doyle in particular has been praised for representing this modernising culture, for presenting a 'new Ireland' (McCarthy, 2003, p.2) and the emerging youth. However, in the presentation of the 'new', Doyle retains more traditional modes of feeling and behaviour, and reinforces their authority for his audience while, by contrast, Bolger presents this tradition while also challenging it.

Specifically, Christy's shame comes from an individual perspective on his inability to fulfill his gender role in society, whereas Jimmy's shame is imposed on him. This juxtaposition is an important one as Jimmy Sr is presented as haphazard and foolhardy and in all realms his shame is presented as justified. Bolger presents Christy as both complex and pro-active, and challenges stereotypes of the working class Northside man by foregrounding the economic pressures of unemployment. Bolger also demonstrates the capacity

for support the wider family can provide in contrast to intensifying individual shame:

> **Christy** Real fathers go to work and people look at them instead of looking through them.
> **Dessie** You'll get a job again.
> **Christy** Who are you codding? (*Looks down*) Do you want this last pigeon?
> **Dessie** The pigeons are yours. I'm no good with them.
> **Christy** (*turning his back and letting his hands fall*) Fine so.
> **Dessie** You bastard. You killed it
> **Christy** *(exiting*) I wish someone would do the same for me
> **Dessie** *turns to* **Carmel** *who enters*
> **Carmel** He's jarred, son. We had a visitation from the dole office. You'd swear we were sheltering Lord Lucan from how they swarmed in. A tip off about your Da doing a nixer last week. He didn't even get paid for it. With the lousy few bob they give us to live on he has to be doing something. Otherwise he'll go mad and by Christ he'll drive me daft too.
>
> (Bolger, 2010, p.42, 43)

In this scene, and throughout the play, the narrative construction of Christy provides space for solidarity. His is actively trying to be productive yet it is the wider systems that restrict him. In *The Van*, Jimmy sabotages himself and is presented as unintelligent. Galbraith asserts that this is an essential element in the construction of the culture of contentment and the justification for the functional underclass.

> The first and most general expression of the contented majority is its affirmation that those who compose it are receiving their just deserts.

> What the individual member aspires to have and enjoy is the product of his or her personal virtue, intelligence and effort.
>
> (Galbraith, 1992, pp.18)

When the tendency towards the presentation of the working class in Doyle's trilogy is largely as unintelligent, unethical and immoral it is difficult to maintain the position that his trilogy is based on an 'interest in giving voice to a working-class family' (McGlynn, 2005, p.144) As postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty claims, 'it was the peasants and the workers, the subaltern classes, who were given to bear the cross of "inadequacy," for, according to this version, it was they who needed to be educated out of their ignorance, parochialism, or, depending on your preference, false consciousness' (1992, p.7). In Doyle's trilogy the working and lower class Northsiders are given the cross of inadequacy to bear. This ghettoises the Northside as Massey contends that, 'representation – indeed conceptualisation – has been conceived of as spatialisation. (Massey, 2005, p.20) The nuanced and linguistic traits of Northsiders adopted by Doyle ghettoises their culture and mannerisms: '[I]t is not just that representation is equated with spatialisation but that the characteristics thus derived have come to be attributed to space. (Massey, 2005, p.20) Bolger challenges this and highlights the complexity of poverty and how it manifests. While also highlighting the wider structures that generate uneven development. In *The Consequences of Lightning*, Bolger captures the lasting psychological implications of belonging to the subaltern described by Chakrabarty:

> **Frank** Don't even try and make me feel guilty about what I have, Martin, because I have worked hard to get it. Poverty isn't just about money; it's about horizons and confidence. It's about standing outside a café, recounting coins, knowing you have enough but still afraid to enter in

> case there's an extra charge you haven't seen, in case you get caught out for being where you don't belong.
>
> (Bolger, 2010, p.237)

To conclude, Paul Ricoeur suggests there is a responsibility to the interpretation of representation to ensure that the cycle of narrative forming identity is positive one:

> It is the task of hermeneutics […] to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting
>
> (Ricoeur, 1990, p.53)

The notion of answerability becomes even more important when writers are championed as brave new voices for oppressed communities. Both Bolger and Doyle represent the heavily stereotyped Northside and it is the obligation of criticism to determine whether the narratives further oppress or empower. Contrary to popular criticism the narrative structure in the *Barrytown Trilogy* imprisons the Northside in a self-perpetuating cycle of failure and represents working and lower class Northsiders as agents of their own demise. *The Ballymun Trilogy* on the other hand uses a narrative structure which provides a site of resistance and an acknowledgment of wider social, economic, and political systems which serve few at the expense of many. The privileged position to tell story, create a narrative and have a forum to be listened to comes with increased responsibility when representing those that rarely get to speak for themselves. The narrative structures employed in literature are a crucial part of the cacophony of voices that create myth, so the onus is on critical scholarship to mount ethical challenges to images created in regard to their possible effects on the real lives lived.

Conclusion

Walk a mile in my Runners: The Illusion of the Northside

This thesis undertook the task of entering into academic conversation to test the critical case for Kersti Tarien Powell's assertion that certain works of fiction and drama constituted a school of Dublin Northside realism. What Powell assumed conflicted with my lived, gendered, class-shaped experience, and this fuelled in me a reaction which motivated this research to actively engage with established and enforced divisions of identity within the boundaries of Dublin city. I became committed to tracing and understanding ways in which fictional narratives either enforce or transcend these boundaries. This thesis developed an original critical matrix to address the task of encapsulating the complexity of the politics of fiction of working- and lower-class Dublin from a personal critical perspective forged among the lower classes of Dublin. This was because the project set out to accurately convey complex lived realities, and a multifarious approach was needed to attempt to coherently explore the consequence and impact of fictional narratives on real lives lived. Ultimately, this thesis is an attempt to begin a real conversation on the existence and actual influence of narrative structures surrounding working- and lower-class people in Dublin, specifically Northsiders. What my research has shown is that fictional narratives were a prominent social tool in the aftermath of independence in postcolonial Ireland, and that theatre in particular was a medium through which an attempt was made to convey the image of new Ireland (Pilkington, 2001). Cultural narratives that reflected an Irish ideal were constructed, but the difficulty of defining a unifying identity for an independent Ireland, unaffected by colonial influence, was very considerable. A hundred years after gaining independence, in the Republic of Ireland, forms of stereotype used during colonial domination such as those previously explored by L Perry Curtis Jn.,

John Hargaden and Lionel Pilkington, have returned under neoliberal ideology, and the contemporary parallel for a subjugated race is now people experiencing poverty. The research also indicates that Ireland's capital is a city divided across not only geographical boundaries but also class divisions and the city is a product of state policies and practices that reinforce these divisions. This thesis has addressed how Ireland's unequal social reality is supported by narratives that reinforce neoliberal social exclusion of the most vulnerable. The challenge for fiction – including, especially, drama – is to opt either to generate, enhance, endorse, or challenge presumptions around the actual identities of people represented in influential cultural narratives.

Does a school of Northside Realism exist? Is it, as my title puts it, an accurate critique or an illusion? It is the position of this thesis that a case can be made for both positions. There is in fact a school of Northside realism, in that there is a canon of plays, and in Doyle's case novels, that uses tropes of realism to engage within a Northside setting. Historical records show that the development of the Northside has differed very significantly from that of the Southside, and the choices made in public policy development – including planning, for instance – has embedded a geographical divide, and generated communities of difference. While lower- and working-class areas exist on the Southside and affluent areas exist on the Northside, household income is lower overall on the Northside and this is reflected in the development of a city in which, 'the granite walls of Dublin's south suburbs contrast sharply with the concrete blocks decorating working class suburbs' (McLaren, 2015, p.10). Places like Ballymun on the Northside have similar issues to those of neighbouring Finglas, Coolock, Kilbarrack, Darndale etc. making issues of endemic poverty pervasive, on the Northside. The regeneration of Ballymun serves as a prime example of the neoliberal attempt to 'develop' 'underdeveloped' communities in ways that focus on and benefit private

investment. This is in line with a 'neoliberal ideology [that] stressed that open, competitive and unregulated markets, unhindered by state interference, represented the optimal mechanism for economic development' (McLaren, 2015, p.14). But complexity lies in the legitimising of the narrative of communities requiring development. What has been established is that the perception of 'underdeveloped' is not only decided based on the capital of an area. A neoliberal agenda generates a culture in which particular social groups are represented and interpreted as innately inferior, so as to legitimate a case for this development. Such representations translate, for policy-makers, into a narrative of subject communities that require domination which manifests more acceptably as urban development projects. In this context, a school of Northside realism generates illusions for general consumption. In short, there is a superficial quality to some of the narrative structures that represent lower and working class Northsiders, masquerading as empowerment but ultimately entrenching people in poverty in a position of inferiority.

This superficial approach to the lower and working class struggle, in this case on the Northside, produces geographies of neoliberalism in which 'locale intimately reflects our class position' (McLaren, 2015, p.9-10). The nuances of fictional narratives inform cultural identities, most especially when there is limited opportunity to see a particular community reflected in popular arts and culture and, most importantly, when images and narratives of these communities are refracted through tropes of inferiority, they reify social stratification. When these fictional narratives influence political dialogue in real terms, they reinforce neoliberal ideology as a common-sense perspective that present social exclusion as a lack of character on the part of those in poverty. Such narratives insidiously, and in some cases completely unintentionally, oppress, and 'inequality becomes internalised as a legitimacy grounded in a rightfully inherited social position' (McLaren, 2015, p.10). It is

the internalised legitimacy of these social positions, presented in fictional narratives, that serve as cultural reinforcers of neoliberalism's oppressive truth claims. The most pressing issue with the presumption or presentation of this ideology as common sense and the vilification of the lower and working classes is that challenging the hegemony is not a simply task. Hegemonic force is obscured by social and cultural forces, to the extent that 'it is not always easy to recognise explicit authority' (Douglas, p.106). Oppressive conditions are legitimised both for those suffering oppression as well as those orchestrating it. This is the case in the contemporary Irish ideological climate, in which 'recent overtly neoliberal Irish governments and their policies […] marginalise those with least economic power' (McLaren, 2015, p.5-6). This marginalisation is difficult to contest as the language used seems to be rational and the legitimised inferiority produced by cultural narratives supports its assumptions. As Kieran Allen points out 'the economic expertise that it relies on displays a considerable class bias. Under the guise of a neutral, technical language, the interests of a wealthy elite are being protected. Levels of social deprivation and inequality have, as a result, risen considerably' (2012, p.422). In the case of a school of Northside realism there is an alignment with Brecht's assertion that in realism 'often the right thing is asked but for but the wrong thing encouraged' (1964, p.309). This is seen in the work of Mercier and Doyle that brought the plight of the lower and working class into contemporary conversation while simultaneously reifying social structures. Brecht stresses 'it is part of the working class struggle for authentic solutions to social problems, so that phony solutions in the arts must be combated as phony social solution not as aesthetic errors' (1864, p. 309). On the other hand, Bolger's surreal approach to Northside realism offer more in in terms of the 'critical realism'(1964, p. 310) emphasised by Brecht. Realist representations include, in the pursuit of recognisability, elusive and misleading tropes that shape the narrative

construction of people in poverty within a neoliberal ideology, and this thesis argues, exposes a school of Northside realism as an illusionary project.

The plays of Paul Mercier (Chapter 3) starkly emphasise the complexity of the illusionary world produced in the name of Northside realism. Mercier's plays were received as bold and daring for placing the lower classes of the Northside on the stage. He is noted as bringing 1980s poverty, and associated issues, to the forefront of Irish theatre and he is applauded for representing a previously underrepresented community on the Irish stage with Passion Machine Theatre Company. This focus on issues of poverty gave the theatre company itself a nickname: 'Northside Theatre'. There is conflicting criticism regarding the intention of Mercier's scripts as cultural commentary. He, himself, has stated that he was inspired by the society he saw around him and, as Michael Pierse contends, 'writing of working-class life or provenance, however fantastic or experimental, does tend to draw attention to social conditions' (2013, p.51).

The plays of Mercier did indeed draw attention to the lower and working classes of 1980s North Dublin. Plays such as *Drowning* (1984), *Wasters* (1985), *Spacers* (1986) *and Studs* (1986) put the lower and working classes of North Dublin on the Irish stage where they had previously been given little consideration, outside of revivals of O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy, the plays of Brendan Behan, or in brief examples of theatrical impact, such as Heno Magee's *Hatchet* (1972). 'Mercier's plays […] brought to the stage many aspects of life in an area of Dublin which had been virtually ignored by Irish Media and mainstream theatre' (MacAnna,1991, p.24). This in itself became a radical act. The novelty of this community represented on stage and the energy of the plays created a furore, with all the raw excitement of something new. Mercier's plays engaged with national issues such as unemployment, crime and drugs, daring 'to put six wasters on the stage […] make heroes out of them

because, society just thinks they are good for nothings.' (Mercier, 2014, Appendix) This is where there is a paradoxical nature to the early plays of Mercier. While issues of poverty were being expressed on the Irish stage there was still the perception of the characters on stage as being 'wasters'. It seemed the intention was to subvert this societal categorisation of lower classes being good for nothings but the dramatic narratives of Mercier's early plays normalised, and so helped to perpetuate a cycle of failure. While being highly entertaining, in terms of cultural commentary the level of futility of the characters legitimises their social position. This is most evident in the final scene of *Wasters*;

> MARTINA: It's cold, isn't it?
>
> LIZ: Yeah.
>
> *Silence.*
>
> DUCKY: When does the sun come up?
>
> JOYCER: Does it matter, Ducky?
>
> *Silence.*

(Mercier, 1985, p.131, Unpublished)

Wasters portrays what bell hooks described as 'collective despair' (hooks, 1990, p.150). Throughout the play the characters discuss having no reason to get out of the bed in the morning and this final scene shows that they have made no journey to alleviate this despair. They are in a never-ending cycle of despair, there is a lot of darkness with no balancing light, and no exploration of what causes this despair. It is within the futility of this collective despair that oppression is internalised. hooks claims that 'it is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonised, there that the freedom one longs for is lost' (hooks, 1990, p.150-151). While Mercier's intention was to draw attention to

the plight of the lower classes and make 'heroes' out of 'wasters' the characters still seem like they are wasting their own potential in the end.

Drowning, *Spacers*, *Wasters* and *Studs* all have what can be categorised as a pervasive sense of collective despair as understood by hooks. When this becomes even more problematic is when, as noted, there is limited general representation of a community and so no relief from this despair in the popular imagination; no mimetic imagery of strength or positivity for a community to be inspired by. When the repeated narrative of a particular section of society is propagated failure then that part of society is in danger of internalising narratives of oppression, and 'an endangered society is one whose members can no longer change the stories they tell themselves' (Bruner, 2004, p.692). As the wider economic environment that these characters live in is not adequately addressed then it is not explicit that 'behaviours that are "rational" are different at different economic levels' (Murray, 2015, p.155). This contributes to the sensationalising of behaviours of people in poverty.

Collective despair excludes these wasters from the main form of society and pushes them into the margins. The aspiration of the leisure class in access to and consumption of goods and culture ensures compliance of the lower classes. Success is measured by status that is obtained through higher levels of consumption. This is the carrot and the stick mentality governing human behaviour in the neoliberal context, legitimising social hierarchies. The aspiration of Luke to be a celebrity in the play *Drowning* legitimises his social position by generating a collective despair about his immediate world and creates a powerlessness:

> Luke: 'And above it all I'd see a whole new me stitched on those clouds. And I'd say to myself, take that great leap, unleash yourself on the world, change your name and shoot a revolution.'
>
> (Mercier, 1984, p11, Unpublished)

The trope of escape is common theme in the world of Mercier's plays, more overtly in *Drowning*. This is seen in the scene in which the Mother's exotic birds desert her and fly out through a window.

> LUKE: And this protected species go apeshit all over the gaff, taking it out on the walls and ceiling as if they had always hated the kip.
>
> The birds gave her the two fingers and legged it forever.
>
> (Mercier, 1984, p28-29, Unpublished)

What is important to note is the word 'kip', implying that the house is undesirable. The spaces the working class inhabit in Mercier's earlier plays are usually described like this, run down, ramshackle 'wastegrounds'. Yet the wider structure that governs these marginal spaces and the wider systems that condemn certain parts of society to a cycle of poverty are not addressed in a meaningful way. The portrayal of the characters as 'wasters' reinforces the idea that responsibility lies with the lower classes, and this legitimises class structure. In this instance it is not enough to discuss the plight of those in poverty without acknowledging these structures. As hooks states, 'these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance' (hooks, 1990, p.151). These narrative structures build the expectation of the failure of the working class, which serves neoliberal bias. This failure is normalised as pointed out by Roddy Doyle when he saw *Studs*; 'I was upset when they lost although I knew they would. *Studs* was perfect. It was my favourite play' (Doyle, 1993, p.1). It seems as if the legitimising of social class in Mercier's work is almost an unfortunate oversight. As Ferdia MacAnna stated, the emphasis was on entertainment and attracting non-theatregoers to the theatre with something new and energetic. The futility also inspired an acceleration of the oppressive narratives in the work of Mercier's peer, Roddy Doyle.

The plays of Roddy Doyle and the dramatic narrative of his novels (Chapter 4), convey this acceleration. Doyle's work became much more visible nationally and internationally than the work of Mercier and the social and cultural effects of this accelerated narrative are much more pervasive. The novelty of the linguistics and mannerisms of the lower and working class Northside in Mercier's work was amplified with the national visibility of Doyle's work and this novelty was interpreted as authentication for these representations. Fintan O'Toole highlighted this perspective when he said;

> The absurdity of *Brownbread* works dramatically, however, because it is built on a base of authenticity, a robust and supple recapturing of the speech and mannerisms of the working-class suburbs of Dublin.
>
> (O'Toole, 2003, p.58)

It is the perspective of this thesis that it was the reception of the work being authentic that allowed the oppressive narrative to have maximum effect. The novelty of the speech and mannerism presented the dominant features of Northside culture and the illusion that is was therefore fully authentic. The novelty coupled with the comic nature exacerbated what Brecht described as a 'mirror surface reality' (1964, p.107) which offered a superficial nature of the work as empowering when it is, in fact, oppressive as this approach 'cannot expose the structures of relations of power (Brexchet, 1984, p.107). The plight of the most impoverished in Dublin is presented for laughs in Doyle's work. As O'Toole further demonstrated in his review of *War*:

> Everything has been funny, even the disasters and the agonies, the fights and the nervous breakdowns.
>
> (O'Toole, 2003, p.87-88)

All of the hardships suffered by the poorest people on the Northside are available for comic opportunity and effect in Doyle's work. While laughter through strife can be framed as resilience and empowerment, in the case of the dramatic narratives of Doyle's work the extreme futility and incompetence of the characters is more an exploitation of people in poverty as opposed to exploration of the issues that have made them so. The boys in *Brownbread* having no rhyme or reason for kidnapping the bishop, the failure of the band in *The Commitments* despite their talent, Sharon in *The Snapper* being drunk in the carpark, the fecklessness of the father of the Rabbitte/Curley family, the inability of Bimbo in *The Van* to maintain basic health and safety in his chip van despite years of experience in the food industry. Taken together, a pattern in which such projects culminate time after time in failure communicates a view that working-class people cannot act in their own interests, in any circumstances encountered in everyday living. The resilience that 'laughter with' can bring is instead redirected as 'laughter at' these characters typical slovenliness. As Dermot McCarthy states Doyle brings 'comic resolution to a potentially home-wrecking situation' (2003, p.54). The characters themselves are presented as incapable of bringing any real resolution to their situation and the wider societal structures that cause these issues are absent or glossed over, imprisoning the Northside in class structure which the plays legitimise by not staging.

Doyle's work reframes traditional ideologies of control for the neoliberal climate rising in Ireland during the boom. The colonial subject other is reframed as the incapable poor. The oppression of sexuality by the Catholic Church is reframed in the dirt and grit images of purity and impurity suggesting inferiority as a character flaw. Kieran Allen highlights how reframing these narrative structures to suit neoliberal ideology is prevalent in contemporary Ireland:

> As Ireland turns its back on the Catholic Church and becomes more secular, they appear to have taken up the role vacated by the priesthood.

> The economic priesthood reads the signs of Markets rather than of deities and preaches their sermons from television studios rather than church pulpits. Ironically, however, the message bears a remarkable similarity. Sacrifices from the majority are necessary for the atonement of sin and the promise of a happier life in the hereafter.
>
> (Allen, 2012, p.330).

Doyle's characters do not atone in any way. It is rare that they are presented with any capacity for humility or with any process of learning from past mistakes. They portray the same approach repeatedly with the same level of futility; laughing and singing as they do so. This makes them increasingly difficult to sympathise with or to see them as in process within a wider system. The images of dirt and grit most specifically associated with female sexuality are specifically reminiscent of the ideology of the Catholic Church reframed for the priesthood of the markets. Paula describing her first sexual encounter marks her out as deserving of the horrific sexual and physical abuse she suffers at the hands of her husband. The construction of Paula conveys that she seeks seedy sexual encounters of the lowest form:

> Paula:
> I wanked a boy in the back of the room. During Religion, in third year. Martin Kavanagh, one of the few fine things in the school and the only one in our class. Big and as thick as day-old shite. A big Slade fan. I didn't masturbate him, now, Gerard: I wanked him. There is a difference.
>
> (Doyle, O'Byrne, 2001, p.6)

The insistence that she 'wanked' and did not 'masturbate' Martin Kavanagh and the way she conveys this information when she is told her husband is dead presents Paula as sexually feral. Her description of him 'Big and thick as day old shite' further compounds the images of dirt and grit in regards to her own

view of her sexuality and affirms her social position. Sharon's method of laughing and drinking her way through her pregnancy using as much foul language as possible legitimises her attack. Never do we see Sharon having an overwhelming moment of joy and deep love for her unborn child. When it seems like this might happen in the final moments of the film when Sharon's baby is born the ambience is shattered by her cackle that 'Jesus I called her Georgina'. There could be an argument made that *The Snapper* and *Paula Spencer* originated in another time. The contemporary campaign for equal rights for women and the strength of feminist movements challenging the treatment and language used regarding women has taken significant steps forward. The #metoo movement in 2017 brought issues of harassment and sexual assault - both hidden and overt – into the plain sight. A result of this movement in Ireland was a series of allegations of sexual harassment against the former Artistic Director of the Gate Theatre, Dublin, Michael Colgan. With these leaps forward, it could be simply that *The Snapper* is a residue of a cultural moment when perceptions were different. Yet, *The Snapper* is about to enjoy a second run, ironically in The Gate theatre, in June 2019, as part of their *Love and Courage* season. Audiences will still go and probably laugh at a drunken girl, raped by her friend's father and then found to be pregnant. In the reruns of the film version Sharon, in a post-partum daze, still howls with coarse laughter that she has named her baby daughter Georgina, and her rapist was called George. Georgie Burgess will once again take Sharon's underwear when she is incoherent, call her a 'good girl' and offer her a tenner to buy herself 'some sweets, I mean drinks' in a line placed to induce laughter in the audience. It will still, without irony, be described in reviews, as it was when revived in 2018, as a play about an unplanned pregnancy; 'At the centre of the drama is the unplanned pregnancy of 20-year-old Sharon' (https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jun/23/the-snapper-review-gate-

theatre-dublin-roddy-doyle). The post #metoo review contains no mention of Sharon being raped.

Doyle is still now celebrated and praised for bringing witty Northside banter and issues of the lower and working class into the mainstream conversation. His narratives and their reception have largely remained the same since they were first received in 1980s and 1990s Ireland. What this reveals is that instead of an enlightenment in regards to the plight of lower classes, that there is a deepening of attitudes that validate this social division. This thesis does endorse Eamon Maher's position that Doyle 'comes to grips with societal change in Ireland in a more systematic and ultimately convincing manner' (2007, p.158-159), yet this endorsement is qualified on the basis that Doyle comes to grips with societal change while, from a working-class perspective, fuelling neoliberal narratives of social division. He systematically reifies cultures traditionally socially excluded, by reframing them in the neoliberal context in a convincing manner. While he brought sex and bad language to the stage and screen in his work, he did so by narrative exploitation of the lower classes. Dermot McCarthy praises Doyle for making 'poor urban Irish' visible by writing them into presence in a national conversation. This thesis suggests that their presence was severely limited by the tropes identified in his work, and served only to further push them into the margins of society in a socially acceptable way.

There is a stark contrast between this narrative construction of Northsiders in this work and the narrative construction of Northsiders in the work of Dermot Bolger (Chapter 5). As Victor Merriman states 'something is at stake in Irish theatre' (Bolger, 2001, p.54), as, historically, theatre in Ireland has provided images which help build a conversation about our place in the world, especially since independence (Chapter 1). In Bolger's construction of the Northside the wider systematic elements that contribute to the issues experienced by the lower and working classes are at its heart. Bolger's

Northside is a place in process, a meeting point of many histories and trajectories being squeezed by neoliberal policies. As Paul Morgan stresses 'the concept of place refers to the subjective experience of embodied human existence in the material world' (2010, p11), and Bolger's work places significant emphasis on this point. Although Bolger focuses on the personal narrative, how his characters negotiate their lives through the trials and tribulations of the Northside is inextricably linked to the material culture in which they are bound up; in this case, neoliberal Ireland.

Most interesting was the paradoxical nature of the criticism of Bolger which exposed the class-based formation of dominant critical voices located in the leisure class of neoliberal structure. The dichotomy of Kiberd's assertion that Bolger's Dublin was inaccurate as it was in opposition to what Kiberd saw as a 'vibrant'(Kiberd, 1996, p.609) city, reinforces a neoliberal project of generating an aspirational class for the economic other to emulate (Chapter 5), at the same time as claiming that, because Bolger's work exposed a structure of social exclusion propping up an Irish boom he has wandered into a paradox. It demonstrates the consequences of what Mary Douglas meant when she stated that explicit authority is not easy to identify. Kiberd's use of the word, 'sordid' is an example of the casual demonization of the struggles of those experiencing socially generated scarcity. The failure to discuss class enables such people's lives to be presented as less than, inferior to, the 'vibrant' lives of those who benefited from Dublin's boom, which produced poverty in the first place. Bolger captures the trauma of this condition in his plays in vivid poetic forms, such as the repeated motif of *One Last White Horse*,

> HORSE'S VOICE: […] I've been saving it for you all day son, I knew how thirsty you would be. Lemonade! See how the light flows through it like it were champagne. The longing inside you is so much you can almost taste the bubbles bursting on your tongue. Throw your head back,

> son, throw it back. […] EDDIE is almost gagging with the strain of trying to swallow […]
> Can you not see, son? It's a trick glass, a trick.
>
> (Bolger, 1992, p.148-150)

The trick glass is a powerful metaphor for how neoliberal ideology fools the lower classes into thinking that if they just adhere to what Charles Clark calls 'work and wait' (2002, p.417-418), then they too can benefit from participation in Kiberd's 'vibrant zone of creativity'. This is a clear example of a respected cultural commentator refusing to critique a neoliberal ideology of an idealised aspirational class. This adds to a pressure whose effects Bolger stages in all his work. Poverty and dehumanisation narrows the bandwidth of Northside communities locked out of, or desperately attempting to enter into an impossible prosperity. This 'trick' returns in *From These Green Heights* as Dessie and Marie try to navigate the stigma of being from Ballymun while trying to progress from the scarcity they grew up with. It is evident in *The Townlands of Brazil* in Michael (Act1; the 1960s), who is forced to emigrate to find work and the hope of a more comfortable life, is juxtaposed (Act 2) with Polish immigrants, Monica and Anna – members of Galbraith's 'functional underclass' – forced to separate from their families to attempt a more prosperous life in Celtic Tiger Ireland. In *Tea Chests and Dreams*, Bolger highlights the pressure on members of the underclass to emulate the upper echelons of society as a means of overcoming their precarity. We see best friends from Ballymun, Josie and Jeanie, argue because of Jeanie's new boyfriend, from middle-class Terenure, who takes her away from her roots and tries to isolate and change her.

> JEANIE: Simon's doing his finals.
>
> JOSIE: His final what?

> JEANIE: I don't exactly know. He's always saying things like I'm meant to know them. He's a class of accountant now and after his finals he'll be some other class of accountant.
>
> JOSIE: I hope you find changing class as easy.
>
> JEANIE: I'm changing nothing.
>
> (Bolger, 2012, p.14)

In *One Last White Horse*, Bolger explores both the complexity of this driving need to escape from scarcity, and the difficulty when escape is achieved by showing how insidiously an ingrained sense of inferiority can penetrate psychologically, making failure to become part of the 'vibrant' zone an experience that plunges those on the margins deeper into despair. Some manage to crawl through cracks in the system, such as Frank in *The Consequences of Lightning,* and more descend into chaos like Eddie, in *One Last White Horse*. Bolger portrays the complexity of operating a life limited by scarcity and how financial stability is about much more than money:

> EDDIE: (Sneering) 'I built this, I built that.' I hate you. I don't want your money. (Sudden strength in his voice) Fuck your money! I want your life. (He holds his hand out.) I want to have built things . . . I want to have come home, the good smell of sweat, mortar underneath my nails, dust on my clothes. I want to put money on the table, I want children to look at me with respect. I want … I want … I want to hold my head up in the supermarket, to walk with a full trolley and not look at the price of things, to see butts on the street and not want to pick them up. I want to have been you, you bastard.

(Bolger, 1992, p.199-2000)

So much more is at stake than pounds and pence. By exposing the underbelly of Ireland's boom through the narratives of Northsiders navigating the material world that pushes them to the margins Bolger subverts a tendency on the part of others to exploit and sensationalise the issues of poverty and communicates explicitly whose hands are on the levers of social control. Rather than fix the Northside in a neoliberal ideology, he presents what Massey calls a meeting place of histories and allows for the place and people to be in process. This destabilizes the legitimising tactics of class used in neoliberal thinking.

As Chapter 6 shows, placing these narrative structures side by side makes the ability to empower or oppress even more stark. Katie Beswick draws attention to the importance of representation in performance in the construction of identities of place. She contends that;

> the central power of performative representations lies in the function of performance as central to the formation of spatial meaning, which in turn shapes and alters the production of future spaces.

(Beswick, 2011, p.424)

Placing work done by Doyle and Bolger side by side, exposes choices made in the kind of images and myths of community that these performative narratives can generate. In Doyle's plays, the claim of authenticity associated with novelty of onstage language and mannerisms obscures oppressive narratives. The explorations of the two trilogies, *The Barrytown Trilogy* and *The Ballymun Trilogy* through the lens of the triad of power, sex and class (Chapter 6) exposes further their ability to shape perceptions and geographies of identity. Bolger's construction of working-class Christy (*From These Green Heights*) and his description of his desire for his wife, Carmel, contrasts starkly with Doyle's Jimmy Snr (*The Van*) describing 'riding' his wife, as representations of

working-class sexuality. Jimmy's ignorance of his own primal desire and the lack of respect for his long-term partner makes him seem an undesirable person. In comparison, Christy struggles through much of the same issues as Jimmy yet he has the ability to convey deep love and affection, despite his own emotional shortcomings. What is evident in the comparisons in chapter 6 is that the lower and working-class characters in Doyle's work are inadequate and lack resilience of character. This is where the parallel of othered colonial subject and degraded neoliberal casualty becomes evident. As is discussed by Dipesh Chakrabarty

> it was the peasants and the workers, the subaltern classes, who were given to bear the cross of "inadequacy," for, according to this version, it was they who needed to be educated out of their ignorance, parochialism, or, depending on your preference, false consciousness.
>
> (1992, p.7)

Conversely, Bolger's trilogy exposes the huge market forces that push and pull and oppress people trapped at the margins of market vitality. The cross of inadequacy is not the sole responsibility of the characters. Bolger shows them willing to work and willing to wait, and wait, and wait for work. They follow work, they emigrate and immigrate, and they do so while navigating the complex emotional waters of human life and relationships. While Doyle shows the people of the Northside as powerless to ever change their character, Bolger shows the Northside struggling with a rigged economic system. As Jen Harvie emphasises 'Damage to social equality is not only an effect of neoliberal capitalism, it is an enabling condition of neoliberal capitalism' (2009, p.81). The lower and working class Northsiders are subject to these inequality effects of neoliberal capitalism in Ireland. Exposing this system is a goal of realism in Brecht's terms. This system described by Harvie also affects the accessibility of transformative theatre to marginal groups. As previously noted, Mercier and Doyle's early plays began on the Northside of the city in the SFX theatre on

Sherrard street and the moved closer to the city centre and Southside venues. Bolger's work moved in the opposite direction, beginning in National and off Broadway style theatres and moving into the marginal lower and working class spaces of the city. Harvie points out the wider reaching implications of these systems and how these systems 'affect access to and qualities of social engagement in contemporary culture, including in participatory art and performance but also apparently 'beyond' it, in cultural policy, social policy and economic conditions' (2009, p.17). These systemic divisions manifest in caricature form in the stereotype.

Examples are visible in recent contemporary examples of Irish theatre, as emerging playwrights inherit the task of navigating the stereotype of the lower and working class Northsider. The influence of Doyle's 'authentic' representations of language and narrative being used to sensationalise the lower and working-class takes form in some dramas, such as *No Smoke Without Fire* (2012) by Paddy Murray. Performed in axis Ballymun in 2012 this one-woman show presented multiple caricatured stereotypes of lower and working class Dubliners. Sensationalising issues such as crime, sex and poverty, the language and narrative construction used echoes that of Doyle. Set in the smoking area of a pub on the Northside of Dublin the play sees numerous characters caught up in a burglary. Each character is grotesque and the impurity, dirt and grit made popular by Doyle is pervasive throughout. The same issues of power, sex and class are dominant and the construction of characters present them as inferior:

> How am I supposed to know where you're going to screw him? Haven't I got the same problem with me and Tommo. With six in his house and ten in mine there's no shaggin' room anywhere. I suppose you could always try the back lane behind the chipper like the rest of the natives, but keep away from them wooden electricity poles, or you'll be plucking splinters out of your arse for weeks.

(Murray, 2015, p.11-12)

As in *Damo and Ivor* there is a brief encounter with a grotesque version of the other side of the city in this play. A brief and random scene of a Southsider marooned on the Northside makes clear the culture shock to the character.

> Reynards, yaa super. I'm running a tad late though; I got a flat wheel in
>
> Daddy's car, I'm waiting on the tow truck to arrive. I was going to leave the
>
> jalopy here and get a taxi but daddy went ballistic. Apparently it's front page
>
> news that the yobs in this area are burning out cars wholesale and you know
>
> daddy and his vintage Merc.
>
> Bally, Bally something or other. I wrote it down somewhere. Ballygobackwards
>
> by the look of the natives. I'm in a cesspit of a pub out here waiting
>
> on the A.A. man. Honestly Sorcha, it really is the pits you'd
>
> need a masters in scumbag to understand the locals.

(Murray, 2015, p.14)

The exploitation of the lower and working class of the Northside for cheap laughs suggests that Doyle's style dictates how the working-class is framed for the entertainment of others, a feature attributable, in part, to a lack of class diversity in criticism of his work. Brecht is keen to emphasise that 'it is the job of art criticism to reject what is politically primitive' (1964, p. 309) Once again, a general reluctance to acknowledge the Irish system as neoliberal exacerbates the problem.

In a more radical sense, the influence of the Bolger's approach to narrative construction is also visible in contemporary Irish theatre. While the exploitation of the lower classes dominates a mainstream, there are examples of powerful theatre that subvert the dominant stereotype of the working class Northsider, notably, *The Good Father* by Christian O'Reilly (2002). Performed in the axis theatre in Ballymun in 2015 this two-hander play, with minimal set and fourth wall realism explores issues of class. O'Reilly's play is refreshing in that it explores class divisions within the Northside itself. *The Good Father* stages a working-class man and middle-class woman from the Northside, and the complex implications of Jane's pregnancy following a one-night stand with Tim. He subverts the dominant stereotype of the inadequate working-class male playfully undermining the social prejudice that a lack of education is a result of a lack of intelligence. He explores common assumptions around social class and how fantasies of the inferiority of the lower classes produces an internalised and legitimised sense of superiority of those positioned above them in a social hierarchy:

> JANE: When Harry dumped me, my parents were as heartbroken as I was. It was as if he'd dumped them. But if you think that's bad, you should have seen their faces when I told them I was pregnant with the child of a painter I met at Rachel's party.
>
> TIM: Painter and decorator.
>
> JANE: Painter seemed like a better choice. They're under the illusion that you're an artist.
>
> TIM: Why not just tell them the truth?
>
> JANE: Because I care about their health. And mine.
>
> TIM: Thanks very much.

She shrugs.

TIM: Look, I can take them campin' if that's what they're into…

JANE: I'm sure they'd love that. A tent from Dunnes.

TIM: What's that meant to mean?

JANE: It means wake up and smell the antipasta.

TIM: Well guess what. It wasn't your parents I shagged at Rachel's party. And it isn't your parents that are carryin' our baby.

JANE: Well guess what. My parents carried me. Just me. And they think I owe them more than this.

TIM: Then you're a sap.

JANE: I beg your pardon?

TIM: I said you're a sap.

JANE: So now you're insulting me because of my parents?

TIM: No, I'm tellin' you how it is 'cos you deserve better.

JANE: Well, in case it's escaped your attention, my parents think I deserve a lot better than you.

(O'Reilly, 2015, p.38-39)

These contemporary examples show how attitudes conveyed in the work of Mercier, Doyle and Bolger have evolved into contemporary practice.

There is a particularly compelling limitation on subjugated communities challenging neoliberal ideology. It is rare for people who experience real poverty to obtain a position or opportunity to adequately explore, understand, and criticise their position in society. Both the work of Bertolt Brecht and Jen Harvie as discussed in this thesis highlights this. As Mullainathan and Shafir argue, people who suffer scarcity are so preoccupied with bare survival that

space to reflect and criticise their world view and societal position is a luxury never afforded. It is this which makes this thesis unique and also that which almost prevented this thesis from existing at all. Conducting the research for this thesis while suffering financial scarcity – which resulted in time scarcity – gave real meaning to the theory of reduced bandwidth. Processing my personal background growing up in a geography and culture of constant scarcity and attempting to reflect on the effects of this while also having a taxed bandwidth was the most challenging of all. Once I acknowledged that this is part and parcel of the neoliberal system at play, I was spurred on to complete this thesis despite numerous physical and psychological difficulties. Someone from my background, having this space to reflect, criticise and give real voice to this struggle is rare, yet it is vitally necessary if neoliberal social exclusion is going to be addressed in any real way. Encountering Bolger's work in my late teens disrupted how I had previously seen myself. Before this encounter, seeing narratives of my social class and geography meant troubling exposure to Doyle's loaded imagery and silent class assumptions. Imagining myself and my community in a new way helped me to articulate some of my frustrations and lift the curtain on a system in which I was caught. These narratives helped me to see cracks in the system. The cracks which I was able to occupy, through both meaningful and tokenistic projects and initiatives, helped carve the space for this thesis. Exposing the neoliberal myth of the Northside revealed realism's ultimate illusionism, empowered my place in the margins and reconfigured my place in the geography of our city.

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Appendix

Transcript of sections of Interview with Paul Mercier.

Costa coffee Dawson Street Dublin2

28TH September 2014

Interviewer: Kelly Hickey

Interviewee: Paul Mercier

Kelly:

So this is an interview with Paul Mercier on the 28th of September 2014 for the PhD study Northside Realism: Critique or Illusion? So thank you Paul for being here today. So we'll launch straight into it the first question for yourself is;

In 1984, yourself and John Sutton co-founded the theatre company Paasion Machine. What instigated the creation of the Passion Machine?

Paul:

It came about, well there was a few things, the main ones were we wanted to do our own work, and be in control of our own work. And, eh, not have to rely on anybody else to do that work, essentially, so we created our own company to do it. but that all sounds very grand

although there was a mini manifest of the time, we were in a position to say that we wanted to do work that was original, indigenous, emm, and about, and for an audience , of and about and for a particular audience in other words what we were kinda saying was that look, emm, the feeling was that a lot, we didn't feel that theatre was, in a way, expressing , or giving voice to, or showing the world as we saw it, essentially. Now that's, at the time was, Dublin. Our generation our, work, where I was working and the people I was coming into contact with, there was just no sense that in any way, this, this world was being reflected at all. So, eem, I wanted to write about that, and in a way put that experience on the stage, and, eem, we also felt that the way to do this was to do it ourselves, independently. Not as some, not as a kind of, eh, as a two fingers to the, to the business or anything like that, it wasn't that, there was no, it wasn't that, but we just actually thought at the time, that you know there is no reason why we couldn't do that, absolutely no reason why we couldn't do that. It's not that we were saying, we're against, we're against them, it's just that we just said actually, it isn't happening so we'll do it ourselves. So it's a case of saying, we'' if nobody else is doing it, and if nobody else is doing it well we'll do it ourselves. And that all coincided with a project that we started working on which was Drowning, which was the rock musical Drowning, so, the creation of Drowning and the writing of it, and the putting, and the producing of it, and the getting, choosing the venue for it, which would, which was at the time the St. Francis Xavier hall, which was a bingo hall at the time, and, taking advantage of the fact, that somebody like Dennis Desmond (3.34) had just moved into the, this, bingo hall, this variety hall, own by the pioneer club at the time

13:34

Paul:

What was always, there was a sense, well, we know why we are doing this. There is absolutely no doubt in anybody's head why this going on, that's the reason for it. That's it. And that sustained us.

Kelly:

Margret Llewellyn states that 'emergent new writing about the 'heroism of urban life' was crucial to emerging new Irish cultural identities' (2002, p.101).

Yeah well, that's an interesting statement, but yes, I did, a certain type of urban life. I certainly wanted to make a hero of the ordinary person. The ordinary, the ordinary. And I certainly wanted to put that kind of person on stage and that character on stage who most people would not, would not, consider to be sufficiently heroic for theatre. But to find a way of giving them, of making their tragedy of making their comedy just as theatrically important as anybody else's. Do you know what I'm saying? So, and that's why I think the theatre has that kind of power and that's why it was a way of communicating. So to some extent, yes, if that's, if that's what it means. Heroic, or the anti-heroic. Because many of the characters are anti-heroes, but they're really heroes. So you're kind saying, but if it means for example, if it means, my ultimate act in *Wasters* was, at the time, it's all very well now, but at the time, the idea is putting six wasters on the stage, that was the idea. That's all I was doing. I'm going to put six wasters on the stage and I'm going to make heroes out of them because, society just thinks, just, you know, they are good for nothings. And that came about really when I was, I was teaching at the time and I was teaching those type of people and I remember then when I wasn't teaching them and I met them, I met a gang of them, on the, on the, on the street one summer. They had nothing to do, hanging around. There was almost, and I was almost like they were looking for me to give them something to do. But it was almost like, I, just really felt that the real tragedy then was that their worlds are already dead ends. It's a dead end, this is terrible. I just had this conversation with them, and it was like, nothing, there was just, nothing. I don't know what it was. And there was no sense from them that they. That they were empowered to be able to make it happen for themselves. They weren't being empowered. And you kinda feel guilty, as well, well, I'm supposed to be teaching them, empowerment, empowering them, or helping them, this is what the education system is all about. And you just, this sense, well, where is all gonna, it's just going to follow through. So I just kinda said 'God', and yet I absolutely, I thought they were fabulous, fabulous, fabulous. So much there so much potential. Anyway, so that's what happened.

Min 17:16

Kelly:

Do you feel your work was crucial to working class identity.

Paul:

Oh yeah, well yeah I do think we contributed, because that's why we did it. Cause one's sense of identity is critical, it's just critical. And if you identity is in some way diminished or undermined or just, completely, or worse still, just, just not even recognised, an identity that is not recognised, or, or, worse still it recognised for being all the, for all the worst things. And there is no sense that it's anything else, that is couldn't be anything else. That's, yeah, that's what we were at. That's what we were trying to do. You know that evolved because, where as in Wasters and Studs and Spacers, it was all about that and everything. Then I moved on. Then there was, it's all about then, other things, other identities. Like, you know, I even got to the stage where you know, it's all about a certain class of people. There are other identities there as well. And I fell, that I, you know, I kinda felt that people's experience, identity , I always associate identity with experience, so therefore, peoples' experience of life and the world, everybody's experience is important but some people's, but the way our culture is it values, or puts a value on other people. So some people's experience is more important than others.

But we are all living the same life. So, ehh, so, it's just a way of saying, well actually, no, no, that experience, that persons experience of life also, and what they're going through and the difficulties they are going through, the conflicts, that's important as well. So, therefore, I was going into other worlds, like in the Dublin, in the *Kitchensink* and all of that it's just saying, actually no, there are other, there are other experiences out there too. That are also, like, ghosting, ghosting through this culture of ours. And just dealing with that, bringing them out. And ehh, and that is, that is always at work. Always.

Min 21:00

Yes, we went after the audience that was literally outside the theatre. [...] We went to the schools, went to factories, went to businesses, went to everybody and anybody. It was almost an act, again, of saying 'this is theatre for you, you know, you're more than welcome, we'll give you a cit price, we'll even do a deal where we will bring half of you in for nothing', we did everything to get the audience in. And emm, so you would have, and then you had, you know on a given night, the demographic of the audience, the profile of the audience, you would have, eh, an extraordinary mix of people. You would have, ye know, either local people or people who never went to the theatre, ever. Never went to the theatre, and then you had people who went to the theatre all the time. So, in other words, it would be wrong to say that there wasn't support, ye know, the front of the SFX used to be full of bikes.